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DANḌIN

Tales of the Ten Princes
(*Daśa Kumāra Charitam*)

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Daṇḍin

TALES OF THE TEN PRINCES

Daśa Kumāra Charitam

Translated from the Sanskrit with an introduction by A. N. D. HAKSAR



Contents

About the Author

Dedication

Introduction

Key to the Pronunciation of Sanskrit Words

A Note on the New Edition

Pūrva-pīthikā

{1}: The Birth of the Princes

{2}: The Brahmin's Tale

{3}: The Tale of Soma Datta

{4}: The Tale of Pushpodbhava

{5}: The Wedding of Avanti Sundarī

Daśa Kumāra Charitam

{6}: The Tale of Rajavahana

{7}: The Tale of Apahāra Varmā

{8}: The Tale of Upahāra Varmā

{9}: The Tale of Artha Pāla

{10}: The Tale of Pramati

{11}: The Tale of Mitra Gupta

{12}: The Tale of Mantra Gupta

{13}: The Tale of Viśruta

Uttara-pīthikā

{14}: The Later Part

[Notes](#)

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TALES OF THE TEN PRINCES

DANḌIN was born to Viradatta and Gauri in a family of priestly scholars about 1300 years ago. He lived in Kanchi, near modern Chennai, during the reigns of the Pallava kings Parameśvara Varman I and Narasimha Varman II in the period c. 650-750 CE.

Dandin has been a celebrated name in classical Sanskrit literature as a novelist, poet and pioneering literary theorist. His work was known as far apart as ninth-century Kashmir to tenth-century Sri Lanka and thirteenth-century Tibet. Apart from *Daśa Kumāra Charitam*, he authored *Kavyadarśa*, an epic poem now known only through quotation.

*

ADITYA NARAYAN DHAIRYASHEEL HAKSAR was born in Gwalior and educated at the Doon School and the universities of Allahabad and Oxford. A well-known translator of Sanskrit classics, he has also had a distinguished career as a diplomat, serving as Indian high commissioner to Kenya and the Seychelles, minister to the United States, and ambassador to Portugal and Yugoslavia. Haksar's translations from the Sanskrit include *Hitopadesa*, *Simhasana Dvatrimsika*, *The Shattered Thigh and Other Plays* and *Subhashitavali*, all published as Penguin Classics. He has also compiled *A Treasury of Sanskrit Poetry*.

P. M. S.

*In memory
of
Prakash Narain Haksar
1906–1969*

a prince among men

Introduction

The words of the teacher Dandin
Are a treasure of pure nectar,
Their expanse a jewelled mirror
For the sport of Vedhas' spouse.

The spouse of Vedhas, the God of Creation, is Sarasvatī, the Goddess of Speech. The verse translated above is by the fourteenth century Sanskrit poetess, Gangā Devī.¹ Dandin had been a celebrated name in the literature of this classical language of India since much earlier. A thousand years ago, he figured in the critic Rājaśekhara's list of writers who had mastered Sarasvatī.² References to him and his work are widespread, from ninth-century Kashmir to tenth-century Sri Lanka and thirteenth-century Tibet.³ While they pertain mostly to his famous treatise on poetics, a well-known verse on literary excellence also cites 'the similes of Kālidāsa, the majestic sense of Bhāravi, and the fine phrases of Dandin....'⁴ Another lauds him as the peer of the legendary composers of the *Rāmāyana* and the *Māhabhārata* epics.⁵ There is no doubt, says yet another, that Daṇḍin is *the* poet. Such has been the reputation of the author of the *Daśa Kumāra Charitam*.

*

Modern scholarship places Dandin in the period c. AD 650-750. He lived in Kanchi, the capital of the south Indian Pallava empire, during the reigns of Parameśvara Varman I and his son Narasimha Varman II. Kanchi, a great centre of commerce and culture at that time, is also remembered in tradition as one of the seven sacred cities of ancient India. It stood at the site of the present town of Kanchipuram near Madras, which is best-known now for its many temples and its hand-woven silks.

Some autobiographical details have come down in Dandin's writings. He was descended from a family of Brahmin scholars of the Kauśika gotra or clan. His great-grandfather, Dāmodara, was born in Achalapura near modern Nasik in Maharashtra, but migrated

southwards, settling eventually at the Pallava capital where he composed various learned works under the patronage of King Siṃhavishnu Varman. His son Manoratha, and grandson, Viradatta, continued the scholarly family tradition.

Dandin was born to Viradatta and his wife Gauri after several daughters. His formal education commenced when he was seven, and his father died soon thereafter. Then the Pallava lands were invaded, there was famine and pestilence, and Dandin was obliged to leave the capital. The invasion was perhaps that of the neighbouring Chālukya king Vikramāditya I who is known from separate records to have captured Kanchi in AD 674. He was driven away by Paramesvara Varman I who ushered in a period of tranquillity in the empire.

During his exile, Dandin wandered in other parts of the country, staying and studying at different gurukulas or hermitage schools. He returned to Kanchi after peace had been restored, and probably did much of his writing there. He must also have taught, considering the honorific āchārya, or preceptor, often used with his name. Little else is known of his life except for an excursion he made to nearby Mamallapuram to inspect repairs at a seaside temple there. From that account he appears to have moved in cultivated society and had courtly connections. The architect who invited him to visit the temple was also a writer of repute in Tamil. Other friends associated with the visit included a general's son and two scholars of the time.⁷

The name Dandin means, literally, a staff bearer. As this term is also used for certain orders of Indian ascetics, it has been conjectured that Dandin too was one, and the figure of a staff-bearing monk in a Tibetan xylograph has been mentioned in one academic work⁸ as his likeness. Other scholars doubt if it can be connected with him merely on the basis of the name's literal meaning. Neither can such a connection be supported by what is revealed of Dandin's personality in the work presented here. He was obviously a man of vast and variegated learning which covered sacred and secular literature, law and government, the fine arts and erotics and a host of other subjects. He appears also to have observed at first hand a tremendous variety of contemporary life, from palaces and hermitages to whorehouses and gambling dens, from roadside cockfights to military operations, and from staid domestic routines to sinister occult rituals. The personality which comes through is one of an erudite and orthodox, but experienced and cynical man of the world who views life with a measure of humour and irony, occasionally with tenderness and faith, but practically never with any monastic or ascetic conviction.

Rajasekhara is also quoted as saying that there are three famous works by Dandin.⁹ Though this tenth-century critic and dramatist does not name them, it is acknowledged by modern scholars that one of these works is the well-known dissertation on poetics entitled *Kāvyādarśa* or *Kāvyalakṣaṇa*. It is an important work of its kind. Apart from having been a respected text for literary studies in the medieval period, it is also regarded as having influenced similar works in other Indian languages like Kannada, Tamil and Hindi.¹⁰ Studied and paraphrased as far away as Sri Lanka, Burma and Tibet,¹¹ within India it has been the subject of learned comment from the middle ages right up to the present century.¹²

The *Kāvyādarśa* consists of four sections, of which all but the last are extant. The first gives definitions and classifications of various literary forms, and describes the ornate eastern Gaudī and the simpler southern Vaidarbhī styles of classical Sanskrit writing, together with intermediate variations. It also specifies the *gunas* or virtues of poetic expression. The second section explains and illustrates thirty-five *alankāras* or figures of speech which embellish literary language. The third further discusses the *yamaka*, another embellishment which consists of alliterative repetition of syllables, and goes on to deal with *chitrabandhas* or unusual literary techniques, and also discourses on the *doshas* or blemishes of expression.¹³

With his detailed discussion of the virtues and embellishments of language, Daṇḍin is considered a pioneering exponent of the school of poetics which emphasized *riti* or style as the hallmark of literature. The priorities of this school may have led to the mannered and artificial composition which became the bane of later Sanskrit; they were also contested by other schools which emphasized *dhvani* or the quality of suggestion. In the history of Sanskrit literary theory and criticism Dandin nevertheless remains a major figure, coming chronologically after Bhāmah in a distinguished line of critics and scholars which stretches after him, through Vāmana, Rājaśekhara and Ānanda Vardhana, to Bhoja at the turn of the millennium.

It is Bhoja's eleventh-century critique, *Śringāraprakāśa*, that gives information about another work by Dandin, the *Dvīsandhāna*. Here Dandin is seen as a stylist himself, rather than a theorist of style. The work is said to narrate simultaneously the epic stories of the

Rāmāyana and the *Mahābhārata* by the use of *double entendre* words throughout the verse composition. Such feats are not uncommon in later Sanskrit literature, given the language's wealth of words and expressions having several meanings, and the possibilities provided by the rules of liaison. Bhoja names the work and the author. He also quotes from it a stanza describing in the same words both Rāma and Yudhishtira, the respective heroes of the two epics. The paronomasia is accomplished by using a compound word which means both 'elder brother' and 'descendant' of Bharata, the appellation in one case of Rāma and of the *Mahābhārata* character in the other.¹⁴ But this tantalizing glimpse is all that is available at present of this work: its text has been lost over the course of time.

*

Daśa Kumāra Charitam, here presented in translation, is the third recognized work of Dandin. A romance in prose, it is the first work of its type presently available in Sanskrit literature. The other two prose romances of the period, the *Vāsavadattā* of Subandhu and the *Kādambarī* of Bāna, are essentially different in their preoccupation with style and embellishment to an extent that it overshadows the narrative. Dandin's work gives preeminence to story and characters, a tradition continued in later works like the verse romance, *Kathāsaritsāgara*.

Known under its present name for at least six hundred years,¹⁵ the *Daśa Kumāra Charitam*'s colourful tales of adventure with vivid accounts of life and manners in ancient India attracted the early attention of Western scholars, and it first appeared in an English version in 1846, in French in 1862, and in German in 1902.¹⁶ The publication of its text in the Bombay Sanskrit Series at the start of the last century initiated a considerable academic debate¹⁷ about the contents and the ascription which has since been settled to a large extent after the discovery of certain other manuscripts in Kerala.¹⁸

The present consensus of scholars is that the *Daśa*, to abbreviate the name for convenience, is part of a longer novel¹⁹ by Dandin, now lost. The opening portion of the latter was recovered in Kerala, as indicated above, under the title *Avantisundarī Kathā*, but there remains a considerable unfilled gap in the narrative between that portion and the *Daśa*. The further portion of the longer work, which would take the story beyond the *Daśa*, is also missing. On the basis of the two available but separate parts, and an incomplete verse paraphrase also

found in Kerala, some inconclusive attempts have been made to reconstruct the fuller story of the original novel, also called the *Avantisundarī*. The final outcome of such efforts much clearly await the coming to light of more material.

The *Daśa* itself, in its present form, consists of three parts. The central part is designated by this title, and has eight chapters. It is preceded by a *Pūrva-pīthikā* or earlier part of five chapters, and followed by a single-chapter later part called the *Uttara-pīthikā*. There is another scholarly opinion²⁰ that only the central part comprising eight chapters is the original work of Dandin, and the two adjuncts before and after it are later additions made to provide a beginning and an end for the story in replacement of the lost longer novel. This conclusion is partly based on the less than smooth transition from the fifth to the next chapter, as well as the somewhat summary nature of the last portion. There are also some discrepancies in the descriptions of characters and incidents mentioned in the two adjuncts, as compared to the central portion.

The discrepancies would be apparent to anyone who follows the narrative with care. In the present translation they have also been mentioned in the accompanying notes. No such indication is needed for the abrupt ending of the story so evident in the *Uttara-pīthikā*. Its summary style is a contrast to the preceding chapters. The stylistic argument is not equally easy to sustain for the *Pūrva-pīthikā* whose opening invocatory verse, moreover, is reproduced in and attributed to Dandin in independent anthologies.²¹ One view concedes that this may be an original verse.²² It has also been speculated that all or part of the *Pūrva-pīthikā* may be a Sanskrit readaptation of the lost original's Telugu translation done by the thirteenth-century poet Ketana, who was also known as the new Dandin.²³

The paucity of conclusive evidence is one of the characteristics of ancient Indian historiography. It may not be easy to determine when and how the *Daśa* came into a separate existence and circulation apart from the *Avantisundarī*. The latter is named in the tenth-century critic Vadijāṅghāla's commentary on Dandin's *Kāvyaadarśa*. The thirteenth-century commentary of Taruna Vāchaspati on the same work refers to the *Daśa*.²⁴ It can be surmised that during the intervening period, the longer work gradually disappeared, and the *Daśa* resurfaced under its present name with the two *Pīthikās* joined to it in further course of time.

The importance of *Avantisundarī*, the recovered part of which also gives Dandin's biographical details already mentioned, is not to be

discounted. But, awaiting further research and discovery, it still remains mainly in the academic domain. The *Dasa Kumāra Charitam* on the other hand, has acquired over seven centuries its own reputation as a well-known romance in classic prose by a writer and scholar of high repute. In view of this identity, as also its style and content, social comment and historical interest, it has continued to be read and relished as an independent work.

*

The plot of the *Daśa* revolves essentially around the ten princes getting separated by accident, meeting again after marvellous adventures, and recounting their exploits to each other. This method provides a thematic unity to what otherwise could have become a series of unconnected stories. A similar device had been used in the much earlier *Brihatkathā*, or great story of Guṇāḍhya, long lost and now known only through later retellings much after the *Daśa*. Dandin may well have borrowed the idea from Guṇāḍhya, some of whose characters appear in the *Avantisundarī Kathā* fragment. He seems also to have drawn from the myths and histories of the Purāṇa and Jātaka literature for individual episodes. But he has woven them into an original work which is in the tradition of the grand romances.

It is tempting to consider Dandin's style by modern standards to which it is nearer in comparative simplicity and directness than the more ornate and laboured languages of Bāna and Subandhu, the other great prose stylists of the period. But it is fairer to view him in the light of contemporary values, notably his own dicta on good writing given in the *Kāvyādarśa*. Scholars note that the language of the *Daśa* displays the virtues of Dandin's preferred Vaidarbhī style. They have also pointed to two aspects in which the writer does not seem to follow the critic.

Dandin the critic advocates elegance in speech and admonishes against the slightest coarseness or vulgarity in expression. While the *Daśa* does not go as far as using the equivalent of four-letter words prohibited by the *Kāvyādarśa*,²⁵ some scholars believe that the latter's canon was sometimes transgressed in Dandin's descriptions of sexual activity.

The *Daśa* also ignores Dandin's tenet that 'vigour, the abundance of compound words, is the very life of prose.'²⁶ The notion that such words invigorate language may of course be challenged today, together with what constituted coarse usage. In the *Daśa* the former at

least seems more a question of suiting the style to the occasion. Dandin provides his share of multiword compounds, specially for describing persons and scenes. King Rājahamsa and his queen in the first chapter, and the sleeping princess and the dance with the ball in the seventh and the eleventh chapters, respectively, of this translation are good examples of such description, often quoted in anthologies.²⁷ But, in deliberate and effective contrast to such purple passages, he uses comparatively stark and simple language to narrate action. At the same time he has not hesitated to display his verbal virtuosity and ornamental skills. The *tour de force* of these is the twelfth chapter, 'The Tale of Mantra Gupta' the original of which is composed entirely without the use of labial letters as the narrator prince is unable to pronounce them, his lips having been bruised by the kisses of his innamorata!

Though Dandin has long been noted for style, it is the *Daśa*'s substance, with its rich variety of characters and situations, which is of greater interest today. Dandin's psychological insights and powers of characterization are not confined to the major figures in his story, the ten princes led by Rājavāhana and the latter's father, the exiled king. He also vivifies the minor personages: the hermit and the merchant, and the dancing girl who seduces them; the old minister cast aside by the young king; the love-struck police chief and the nurse turned procuress; and many others. His lively accounts of situations include assassinations and executions; dance festivals and royal assemblies; springtime romances and naval battles; the domesticity of the kitchen and the horrors of famine. He takes the reader into palaces and prisons, hermitages and harems, pleasure parks and fearful forests. He describes at length the training of a courtesan, the education of a prince, and the taxing daily schedule of a king. In equal detail he explains how to cook a dish of rice and the tools for burgling a house. The *Daśa* also has fantastic episodes with supernatural beings; at the same time it is an absorbing social document.

A controversial aspect of the *Daśa* is its apparently amoral outlook. The princes engage in falsehood, theft, murder and adultery, though their leader, Rājavāhana, himself appears free of such faults. The gods themselves have human weaknesses, and scoundrels posing as holy men manipulate the faith of ordinary people. Unscrupulous methods do not seem to matter as long as the desired results are achieved. It has been²⁸ held that in this respect Daṇḍin offers a contrast to other writers of the period, like Bāṇa and Māgha, who present a harmonious

fusion of realism and idealism. His cynical view has been related to a deep fatalism reflected in the numerous coincidences, providential happenings and divine interventions in the story, which make moral considerations secondary to predestination.

It can also be argued that Daṇḍin is a realist rather than a moralist, and presents life as it is. His characters also include noble rulers and loyal ministers, loving mothers and devoted friends; and wicked deeds are interspersed with spontaneous acts of generosity and courage. More important, perhaps, is the fact that the *Daśa* is not a didactic work but meant, above all, to entertain. Its portrayals are basically light-hearted; they are touched with irony even in passages of intensity. 'The whole work is pervaded by the humour of the wild deeds of the princes.'²⁹ The issue of its amorality also needs to be seen in this perspective.

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An account of the *Daśa* would be incomplete without a glimpse of the age in which it was written. It was a period of transition in India, when the great northern empires had declined and those in the south were in the ascendant. The imperial Guptas and the more recent Harsha of Kanauj were already memories by the time of Dandin, but their cultural impact continued to be felt across the country. The Pallava empire in south India was marked by a synthesis which included both the spread of northern ideas and institutions and the resurgence of indigenous culture. The central Indian Chālukya kingdom, while it warred with powers on both sides, also acted as a bridge for the continuing interaction between the north and the south.

Daṇḍin's time coincided with one of the peaks of Pallava rule. An age of peace, prosperity and artistic activity had commenced after the expulsion of the Chālukyas from Kanchi, though frontier tensions remained. Epigraphic and literary evidence of the Pallava period points to a settled country and a well-organized system of government. The kings were assisted by ministerial councils, and the autonomous local administrations by popular assemblies. Tenancy and taxation, agriculture and irrigation, endowments for worship and education were highly developed. Trade flourished and local merchants ventured as far as south-east Asia. Brahmins had a pre-eminent position in society. An earlier king had converted to Hindu worship from Jainism which was in decline. Buddhism was also in retreat, though monasteries still functioned. Many of these features

are reflected in the *Daśa*.

An interesting example of the cultural confluence during Pallava rule are its bilingual official inscriptions, many of them in both Sanskrit and Tamil. The former, which had originally come from the north, had already produced major literature in the south, notably the work of Bhāravi who had been a friend of Daṇḍin's great-grandfather. While Sanskrit was the language of the court, both it and Tamil were current in literature and administration. The Tamil epics *Śilappadigaram* and *Manimegalai*, showed familiarity with Sanskrit literary style. Another result of the interaction was the rise of devotional cults in the south which later travelled to the north. Among the fine arts, music, dance, and sculpture flourished. This was the period of the existing rock-cut temples and reliefs of Mamallapuram, which also show the dresses and fashions of the time. They may well be contemporaneous with Dandin's own visit to Mamallapuram.

Daṇḍin, writing in Kanchi, places many of his stories in north India. But several scenes and situations he describes are probably based on models nearer home.³⁰ The geographical sweep of the *Daśa* is a remarkable testimony to the common values which already provided a sense of cultural unity in the country, despite its political plurality, thirteen hundred years ago. Only one of Daṇḍin's tales is set in Kanchi. The action of the rest ranges over a canvas which stretches from Trigarta in modern Punjab to Suhma in West Bengal, and from Valabhī in Gujarat to the Uttar Pradesh cities of Mathurā and Vārānasi. References further afield include Kāmarūpa and Koṅkaṇa, Utkala and Aśmaka, in present Assam, Maharashtra, Orissa and Kerala. At the centre of the narrative are the north Indian kingdoms of Magadha and Avanti, in modern Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, which were already rivals in the pre-Mauryan period. By Dandin's time they no longer existed in that ancient form, but the memory and prestige attached to their names were strong enough to justify setting the story there. More to the point, all these far-flung locations are placed in a common cultural framework in Dandin's account.

The *Daśa* also mentions contacts abroad. One of its figures goes on a mercantile expedition to the island of Kāla Yavana, which, it has been speculated, may be Zanzibar or Madagascar.³¹ It is more likely to have been in the Indonesian archipelago if the journey commenced from an east Indian port like Dāmalipta mentioned in the *Daśa*. There are further references to Yavana traders and sailors. Following the traditional derivation of this word from Ionia, it has been rendered as

‘Greek’ in the present translation. But it could also have referred to Arabs or Parsis who had arrived, respectively in Kerala and Gujarat, by Daṇḍin’s time after the rise of Islam. Chinese silk is mentioned as part of the apparel of several damsels who pass through the romance. Another foreign derivative is the word used for money and coins, which originates from the Roman *denarius*.

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The *Daśa* is a mine of information about social conditions and attitudes of the time. The caste system had already appeared, with the priestly Brahmins, the warriors, merchants and farmers identified as such, as also groups based on specialized occupations like courtesans and musicians. Even thieves formed an occupational group with its own manual of precepts by the sage Karṇisuta, now unhappily lost. Outside the system were forest-dwelling tribes and professions like those of executioners. Brahmins living with forest tribes constituted their own subgroup. Interaction between the different groups was relatively free.

The relations between the sexes were comparatively unrestricted. Society was male-oriented, and permitted polygamy. The wealthy guarded their women in harems; but the latter moved about freely, and even princesses gave public dance performances. Men and women met openly and made romantic trysts through go-betweens, mainly old nurses and nuns. Courtesans had a socially accepted position similar to the hetaerae in ancient Greece. They were well-educated, accomplished in the arts, and often wealthy. Girls of good family married early: at least one princess was married at the age of thirteen. Eunuchs were an accepted part of palace staff.

The religious field was dominated by the sanātana dharma, while Jainism and Buddhism also had adherents. There was some friction between the three faiths at the theological but not the popular level. The belief in reincarnation and past births was almost universal. Most people also believed in supernatural beings and possession, and that miraculous powers like physical transformation could be achieved through occult rituals; others were always ready to exploit such superstitions. Centres of pilgrimage had already developed at well-known shrines like those of the god Siva, named Mahākāla at Ujjayinī and Viśvanātha at Vārāṇasi, and of the goddess Vindhyavāsini Devī in the Vindhya mountains. Forest tribes practised human sacrifice to the goddess Chāṇḍika; festivals in the honour of Kāma, the god of love,

were held in towns. Religious faith was deep, but its climate was liberal. People made irreverent comments about the private lives of the gods as described in mythological accounts, and used temple sanctums for carrying out conspiracies, without any sense of sacrilege.

The aristocracy lived in luxury. Their palaces had richly appointed rooms, and were surrounded by elaborate gardens landscaped with pleasure hillocks and pavilions for secret rendezvous. The queens and princesses wore much jewellery and had large retinues of attendants in their private apartments. Rich merchants lived in seven-storeyed mansions. The common people had houses with mud walls which could be tunnelled through for purposes of burglary. The accommodation in monasteries and hermitages was simple, but they were always hospitable to travellers and visitors. People travelled on foot or in bullock carts; royalty and soldiers used elephants, horses and chariots; travel across the seas by ship took place, but was considered hazardous; overland travellers through forest regions ran the risk of being set upon by bandit tribes or wild animals, and usually moved in caravans. As for recreation, attending dance performances and circuses was a popular pastime for refined society; the lower classes frequented cock fights and gambling houses; and the fairs held in parks outside the towns were a gathering place for both.

The system of government was largely feudal. The kings had hereditary ministers and powerful feudatory vassals who not infrequently intrigued and rebelled against them. Bribery and corruption was prevalent and not easy to control. Kings were often at war with each other, sometimes in observance of a code of chivalry which required acceptance of challenges to honour. Spies were used for collecting information and promoting subversion. The classic precepts of Kautilya on statecraft and politics were studied though not always followed. While warriors and retainers gave loyal service to their sovereigns, the common people seem to have been indifferent to their conflicts.

Hermits led their own lives in secluded forest retreats, devoted to study with their disciple communities; occasionally, they also acted as advisers to kings. Merchants were organized in guilds, and the richer ones maintained close contact with the rulers. Prominent citizens discharged the duties of town corporations. It was not unknown for traditional occupations to be changed: one son of a royal minister became a merchant and married another merchant's daughter in a foreign land; another became a recluse, while the third followed the family profession. It is interesting, in conclusion, to consider that

many of the social features described by Daṇḍin are still current in India in the same form.

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There have been several translations of the *Daśa* into English in the present century. Most of them³² are literal, and useful mainly for following the original text to which they are usually annexed. The last literary translation for the lay reader was done nearly seventy years ago.³³ The present effort is intended to bring this old classic before today's general readership in modern English. I have used the Sanskrit text edited by N. B. Godbole and V. L. S. Pansikar, and published by the Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay, in 1936. That edition is also equipped with the four standard Sanskrit commentaries³⁴ on the *Daśa*, from which I have profited, as from the recent Sanskrit and Hindi rendering of Sri Viśvanatha Jha.³⁵

Given the differences in literary convention and linguistic construction between the two languages, literal or even too faithful translations from Sanskrit into English often become unreadably awkward. This is particularly true of attempts to replicate style. Daṇḍin held that the ten *guṇas* or virtues which constituted the essence of his favoured Vaidarbhī style were: the quality of being well knit (*śleṣha*); evenness (*saṃatā*); absence of harshness (*sukumāratā*); vigour (*ojas*); lucidity (*prasāda*); explicitness (*artha vyakti*); dignity (*udāratva*); an agreeable conformity (*kānti*); super-imposition of qualities (*saṃādhi*); and elegance (*mādhurya*).³⁶ The first four of these related primarily to the sound, and the next five to the sense of words. Elegance appertained to both. The meaning and the music of language needed to be in harmony to achieve excellence in expression.

To attempt to reflect Dandin's usage of these *guṇas* in an English translation, particularly the alliterative sound effects of the *yamaka*, and the other embellishments he used to craft his 'fine phrases', can do no justice to the original. It is also unsuited to the language of translation. Multiple compound words, with the sonorous cadences of Sanskrit, would make ridiculous English. Often they are better translated into separate sentences.

Consequently I have refrained from any stylistic replication, nor tried to emulate the master's construction of an entire chapter without labial letters. I have, instead, concentrated on the substance of the text, with its intricately plotted story, a lively portrait gallery of high and low characters, and vivid pictures of the life and customs of the

time. I have also endeavoured to convey some of its pace and flavour in contrasting the flourishes of the descriptive passages with the simpler language used for narrating action. To combine fidelity to the original text with its presentation in a readable contemporary idiom is the chief challenge in any such work, and this I have kept constantly in mind.

While the system of diacritics has been applied in the transliteration of names in the introduction, more commonplace spellings have occasionally been used in the body of the translation to facilitate reading. The longer names have generally been split into two components, for example Apahara Varma and Raga Manjari. A few well-known Sanskrit terms like dharma and artha, and the names of some plants, have been retained in the original form, and explained in the endnotes where necessary. Background information for a better understanding of the text has also been given in the endnotes.

To maintain an overall continuity in the narrative, the five chapters of the *Pūrva-pīthikā* and the following eight of the central section have been numbered serially from one to thirteen in the table of contents, with the *Uttara-pīthikā* shown as the final chapter. All three sections have also been indicated separately, so that it will be clear which chapters come under each. The chapter headings have been provided are taken from the colophons of the text. Sub-headings in some chapters to identify the emboxed stories within them.

My thanks to David Davidar, Editor and Publisher of Penguin Books India, for asking me to undertake this work and giving additional time for its completion. For its careful editing I am grateful to Anubha Doyle. Above all I would like to thank my wife Priti for her unfailing encouragement and support in this, as in all my endeavours, and for her patient and repeated reading and criticism of the drafts.

A. N. D. H.

May 1994
New Delhi

Key to the Pronunciation of Sanskrit Words

Vowels:

The line on top of a vowel indicates that it is long:

a

(short) as the u in but

ā

(long) as the a in far

i

(short) as the i in sit

ī

(long) as the ee in sweet

u

(short) as the u in put

ū

(long) as the oo in cool

e

is always a long vowel like a in mate

ai

as the i in pile

o

is always long as the o in pole

ow

as the ow in owl

Consonants:

k,

b and p are the same as in English

kh

is aspirated

g

as in goat

gh

is aspirated

chh

is aspirated as in *chhota*

j

as in *jewel*

jh

is aspirated

ṭ

and d are hard when dotted below as in *talk* and *dot*

ṭh

is the aspirated sound

ḍh

is aspirated

ṇ

when dotted is a dental; the tongue has to curl back to touch the palate.

ṅ

as in *king*

ñ

is as in *singe*

t

undotted is a th as in *thermal*

th

is aspirated

d

undotted is a soft sound—there is no corresponding English sound, the Russian ‘da’ is the closest.

dh

is aspirated

ph

and bh are aspirated

ṁ

is a nasal sound

There are three sibilants in Sanskrit: s as in *song*, sh as in *shove* and a palatal ś which is in between, e. g. Śiva.

A Note on the New Edition

My thanks to Ravi Singh, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Penguin India, for bringing out this new edition, and to R. Sivapriya and Paromita Mohanchandra for its editing and publication. I have taken the opportunity to make some corrections in the text and additions to the notes. The narrator's name has been added at the beginning of the final chapter to provide continuity: it is not there in the original text.

A. N. D. H.

Vijaya Dashami,
21 October 2007
Noida



PŪRVA-PĪTHIKĀ

The Birth of the Princes

May you be blessed by the foot of Trivikrama,
 Raised on high like the earth-ship's mast,
 Or the flagstaff of sky's starry banner,
 To conquer the three worlds.¹
 It is the hub on which the planets wheel;
 The column on which the universe is furled;
 The stem of the lotus abode of Brahmā;
 And for evil doers the rod of death.

There is a paragon among cities called Pushpapuri, the capital of the land of Magadha. It is famous for its countless hordes of gems and other precious things on never-ending sale, which recall the treasure troves of the ocean.

In that city there was, in days of yore, a king named Rājahamsa. His mighty arms were capable of churning an ocean of enemy forces, full of waves of warriors with battle elephants and war horses as terrible as sea monsters. His fame shone as the autumn moon. Its purity was as camphor or snow, as the jasmine flower or the lotus stalk, as clear water or fresh milk. It was as splendid as the royal swan or the celestial elephant, and as radiant as the laughter of the great god Śiva on Mount Kailāsa. It was attested in song by the nymphs in the gardens of paradise, and its fragrance pervaded all directions.

King Rājahamsa was lord of all the land which is encircled by the gem-laden sea, as a beautiful woman is by a girdle of fine jewels. His power scorched his enemies like the midday sun. His constant and pious charity supported many saintly and learned Brahmins engaged in the propagation of knowledge. In beauty, faultless and enchanting, he was the equal of Kāma, the proud god of love.

His wise spouse was a jewel among women, by name Vasumatī. When the great god Śiva opened his third eye in wrath, and burnt the god of love to ashes, it was as though the latter's attributes had taken refuge in her blameless person. Thus, the god's black bow string had

entered her hair, the lovers' moon her face, and the coupled fish in his all-conquering insignia, her eyes. That vanguard of love, the soft southern breeze, had entered her breath. Fresh flower buds, which pierce the hearts of separated lovers like swords, had been transformed into her lips. Her throat had the graceful lines of Kāma's conch shell, her bosom was like two brimming bowls or a pair of doves, and her arms were as soft as lotus petals. Like a pink lily budding in the river Gangā's eddies was her navel, an ornament of delight. Her deep-set loins were like Kāma's conquering chariot when it subdues the resistance of yogis, and her thighs like his victory columns of plantain stalk. Her feet were like lotus blooms. Love's flower arrows had shaped all her other limbs.

Pushpapurī surpassed the city of the gods. Living there with Vasumatī amidst endless delights, the king of Magadha enjoyed all the pleasures of the earth—which is another meaning of the name Vasumatī.

The king had three hereditary ministers named Dharma Pāla, Padmodbhava, and Sita Varmā. Wise and dutiful, they excelled even the preceptor of the gods in dealing with affairs of state. Sita Varmā had two sons, Satya Varmā and Sumati. Dharma Pāla had three: Sumantra, Sumitra, and Kāma Pāla. The two sons of Padmodbhava were Suśruta and Ratnodbhava. Of all these, the pious Satya Varmā considered this world to be transitory and went abroad on pilgrimage. Kāma Pāla was a rake, kept company with libertines, buffoons and courtesans, and wandered from place to place, heedless of the injunctions of his father and elder brothers. Ratnodbhava traversed the seas in pursuit of commerce in which he was expert. As for the remaining sons of the ministers, they succeeded to the hereditary offices when their fathers were no more.

Once the King of Magadha was angered by Mānasāra, the King of Mālava, who had become arrogant after a recent victory in battle. He set forth contemptuously to make war on Mānasāra. His expertise with arms had already been proved in many engagements in which his sharp arrows had found targets in other royal crowns. The rumble of his kettledrums, deeper than the ocean's roar, startled the elephants which guard the earth's quarters² and they trembled with fear. The earth itself, and the great serpent on whose head it rests, shook at the march of his army with its fourfold division of chariots, elephants, cavalry and infantry. The King of Mālava also sallied out, like war personified, at the head of a large force of elephants.

A fierce battle commenced. The warriors fought hand to hand,

weapon clashing against weapon. The dust raised by the chariots and the horses, mingled with the elephants' flowing rut, spread in the sky like a vast canopy for the heavenly nymphs who had come to choose husbands from among those fallen in combat. A deafening tumult of drumbeats resounded in the air.

In that battle, the army of the King of Mālava was destroyed. The King of Magadha seized him alive, but restored him to his throne out of compassion. Thereafter he ruled undisputed over the sea-girt earth. But, as he was childless, he prayed constantly to the god Nārāyana, the prime cause of all the worlds.

One morning, the Queen of Magadha had a beautiful dream in which she was asked to obtain a fruit of the wish-fulfilling tree from her husband. She then conceived a child, the flower of her husband's hopes. Thereafter he invited other kings and performed the ritual ceremony for the queen being with child. It was done with a magnificence which rivalled that of the king of the gods.

One day, when the meritorious Rājahansa was sitting enthroned in court surrounded by his friends, ministers and priests, the gatekeeper approached him with hands raised in salute, and said: 'Sire, a reverend monk is at the gate. He wishes to meet Your Majesty.' Having received permission, he brought the monk before the king.

Upon seeing the visitor the king immediately understood his secret purpose. Dismissing his courtiers so that only the ministers remained, he said with a smile: 'Well, monk, tell us what you have learnt after your travels in disguise through various countries.'

The visitor saluted the king and replied: 'Sire, in accordance with Your Majesty's command I donned this innocent disguise and went to the capital of the lord of Mālava. I lived there in secret and have returned after collecting all the information about that king.

'The proud Mānasāra suffered defeat and destruction of his forces in battle with you. Humiliated and vengeful, he prayed to the great god Śiva who dwells in the Mahākāla temple of Avanti.³ Propitiating that beloved of the goddess Kālī with his penances, he has obtained from him a terrible mace which will destroy any enemy warrior. Now, arrogantly considering himself invincible, he is preparing to attack you. What should be done is for Your Majesty to decide.'

The ministers deliberated over the spy's statement. Agreeing on what should be done, they said to the king: 'Sire, deprived of other means, the enemy comes to make war with divine assistance. It would not be prudent for us to fight with him at present. It is better to retreat without delay into the fortress.' But, despite their repeated

advice, the king dismissed it as improper and, splendid in his pride, got ready to give battle.

Relying on his divine weapon, Mānasāra effortlessly invaded the land of Magadha at the head of a well-equipped and warlike force. On receiving this news the ministers somehow persuaded the king to let the womenfolk be sent under the protection of the reserve force to the centre of the Vindhya forest which would be inaccessible to the enemy. As for Rajahamsa, he advanced at speed with his fine and fearless army and engaged the furious foe.

The battle between the two opposing sides amazed even the gods who had come to witness it with great curiosity. The lord of Magadha was like Indra, the king of heaven, in his skilful use of the various weapons of war. The ruler of Mālava at last launched upon him the mace he had earlier obtained from the god Śiva. Even though the king cut it into bits with a shower of sharp arrows, it slew his charioteer by virtue of Śiva's infallible command, and rendered the king unconscious in the chariot.

The horses remained unharmed. Guideless, they ran away with the chariot and by chance entered the same great forest where the womenfolk had taken refuge. The victorious lord of Mālava, on his part, overran the entire kingdom of Magadha and occupied Pushpapuri.

The ministers had also been wounded in the battle. Providentially, they escaped with their lives. Revived by the morning breeze on the following day, they collected themselves and searched everywhere for the king. Not finding him, they went sadly to the queen. Vasumatī was grief-stricken on hearing from them about the destruction of the army and the disappearance of the king. She made up her mind to follow her husband in death.

‘Madam,’ the ministers explained to her, ‘the king’s demise is not certain. Moreover, the astrologers have stated that you are carrying in your womb an enchanting and delicate prince who will suppress all the enemies and attain supreme sovereignty. As such your death now would be most inopportune. ‘Persuaded with such eloquence, she was pacified for some time.

But she was unable to emerge from the endless ocean of her grief. At midnight, when her attendants had fallen asleep, she left the camp alone, slowly and silently. Fashioning a deadly noose from the hem of her cloak, she tied it to the branch of a banyan tree. Then, wishing for death, that beautiful woman began to lament in a tear-choked voice sweeter than that of the nightingale: ‘O my king! Handsome as Kāma!

May you be my husband in my next life too.'

The royal chariot had come to a halt nearby, the horses weary with fleeing and unable to go any further. The King of Magadha lay within, inert with excessive loss of blood. The cool touch of the moonlight revived his senses. Hearing the lamentation he realized that it was the voice of the queen, and called out to her softly.

She came towards him uncertainly. But her countenance bloomed with joy as she gazed at him, wide-eyed with delight. Then she summoned the ministers and the chaplain in a loud and clear voice and pointed him out to them.

The ministers made obeisances to the king. Thanking providence, they said, 'Sire, it seems that after the charioteer's death the horses have brought the chariot to this forest by themselves.' The king told them that after the destruction of their army, the lord of Mālava had ruthlessly attacked him with the mace he had received from the great god. The king had lost consciousness, and had only been revived by the early morning breeze in the forest.

At an auspicious moment the ministers conducted the king into the camp with due ceremonies. His wounds were dressed, and the arrow-heads extracted, so that they healed quickly and his face bloomed suddenly like a lotus flower. But he remained despondent and dejected as his efforts had been spurned by an adverse fate.

On the advice of the ministers the wise Vasumatī spoke to him tenderly: 'Majesty, you are the most excellent among all kings in prowess and valour, yet you live today in the middle of the Vindhya forest. This shows that power with all its splendour is only like a bubble of water. It comes and goes like a flash of lightning. It is necessary to remember that everything is in the hands of fate. In the past too there were innumerable kings like Hariśchandra and Rāmachandra, whose magnificence equalled that of the king of heaven. They suffered many sorrows due to the quirks of fate, but eventually ruled over their kingdoms for a long time. Your Majesty will do likewise. So spend some time in prayer and patience till present problems melt away.'

After some time Rājahansa went with all his officers to visit the hermit Vāmadeva. He was famed for his penances and able to provide the means for obtaining what the king desired. Saluting him, the king, who was the scion of the lunar dynasty and wished to get his kingdom back, recounted all that had happened.

After the sage had extended the courtesies due to guests, and the king had rested in the hermitage for some time, the soft-spoken

Rājahamsa said: 'Lord, Mānasāra defeated me with the help of a powerful fate, and is now enjoying my kingdom. I also wish to perform a potent penance and uproot my enemy. That is why I have come to Your Holiness, whose compassion is a refuge for everyone.'

The sage knew the future as well as the past and the present. He told the king: 'Friend, there is no need for penances which mortify the body. It is certain that the prince in Vasumatī's womb will be the destroyer of all the enemies. You have only to wait for some time.' A voice from heaven confirmed the sage's words, and the king accepted them accordingly.

In due time Vasumatī gave birth at an auspicious moment to a son bearing all the favourable signs. The king, who was well-versed in the rituals, rewarded the godlike priest and, adorning the delicate child with appropriate ornaments, he celebrated his birth ceremony and named him Rājavāhana.

In the same period sons were also born to the ministers— Sumati, Sumitra, Sumantra and Suśruta. Splendid like new moons, and bearing signs of long life, they were named respectively Pramati, Mitra Gupta, Mantra Gupta and Viśruta. Rājavāhana grew up playing with his friends, the ministers' sons.

One day a hermit brought to the king a good-looking boy with all the signs of royal lineage. 'Majesty,' he said cordially, 'I had gone to the forest to collect firewood. There I saw a woman in tears. She was obviously poor and helpless. I asked her why she was weeping in the lonely forest. Wiping her tears with her hands, she said between sobs: "Sage, the King of Mithilā, capital of Videha, ⁴ who surpasses the god of love in grace, and whose fame has spread as far as heaven, had come with his family to Pushpapuri to attend the ritual ceremony when his friend the king of Magadha's spouse was with child. While he was staying there, the lord of Mālava attacked the Magadha king after having propitiated the god Śiva.

"When that terrible war began between the two famous rulers, King Prahāra Varmā of Videha duly helped his friend. But his forces were destroyed and he was captured by the enemy. Restored to liberty by the latter's kindness and his own past merits, he set out with the remnants of his troops for his own country.

"Travelling by a difficult forest route, they were violently set upon by a much larger force of the savage Śabara tribe. The king fled with the womenfolk and the bodyguard. My daughter and I were the appointed nurses of his twin sons. Unable to keep pace with him, we were left behind.

“In the forest I soon encountered a fierce tiger with open jaws ready to devour me. Frightened, I stumbled on the rocky ground and fell down. The little boy was thrown out of my arms, and dropped into the nearby carcass of a cow. As the tiger angrily pulled at the carcass, it was suddenly struck down by an arrow from someone’s bow. Then the Śābaras took away that curly-headed little boy. His twin was in my daughter’s arms, but I do not know where she has gone.

“I had fainted, but some kind shepherd took me to his cottage and tended my wounds. I am now in good health and wish to join my master. But I weep as I am helpless and do not know the whereabouts of my daughter.”

‘Having told this to me,’ the hermit continued, ‘she promptly went away, saying: “I will go to my master, even though I am alone.” As for me, saddened by the calamities which had befallen your friend the lord of Videha, I also began to search for the boy who was to be the new bloom of his dynasty.

‘I came upon a fine temple to the goddess Chandikā. There some Kirāta tribesmen, who are the same as the Śābaras, were getting ready to offer a boy as a sacrifice to the goddess for their continued success in war. They were discussing how they should sacrifice him: with a sword after hanging him from a tree; with sharp arrows aimed at him after burying his feet in the ground; or by having him hunted down and savaged to death by young dogs. Addressing them, I said:

“O best of Kirātas, I am an old Brahmin. I have lost my way in this vast and terrible forest. I had placed my little son in the shade, and gone some distance to look for the way. Now I do not know where he has gone and by whom he has been taken. I have been unable to find him despite searching for several days. What should I do, and where should I go? You have not seen him by any chance?”

“Excellent Brahmin,” they replied, “here is someone. Perhaps he is your son? If so, please take him.” And, by a stroke of luck, they gave him to me. Blessing them, I took the child and, after reviving him with some cold water, have brought him to Your Majesty. You are like a father to this boy. He will live long and you must look after him.’

The king tempered his grief at his friend’s tribulations by the pleasure of seeing his son. Naming him Upahāra Varmā, he brought him up like his own son Rājavāhana.

Once the king set out on an auspicious day for a bath at a place of pilgrimage. On his way past a Śābara village he saw a woman nursing a child of exceptional appearance. Moved by curiosity, he asked her: ‘Beautiful one, this enchanting child with all the signs of royalty

cannot possibly be from your family. So tell me whose is he in fact, and how he has come to be in your possession.'

'O King,' the Sabari replied shyly after saluting him, 'when the Indra-like lord of Mithilā was passing by our village, all his belongings were plundered by the Sabara army. At that time my husband captured this boy and gave him to me. I have brought him up since then.'

Having heard this account the wise king realized that it was about the second prince mentioned by the hermit. Persuading the Śabari with money and kind words to part with the child, he named him Apahāra Varmā and handed him over for upbringing to the queen.

Somadeva Sharmā a disciple of the sage Vāmadeva, brought a boy before the king one day, and said: 'Sire, while returning from a bath at the Rāmatīrtha, I saw a woman in the forest carrying this radiant child. I asked her respectfully: "Grandmother, who are you, and why do you take the trouble to wander in the middle of this forest carrying a child?"

"Best of sages," replied the crone, "on the island of Kāla Yavana there is a wealthy merchant named Kāla Gupta. He had a daughter to gladden his heart, Suvritta by name. She was wedded by Ratnodbhava, a son of the Magadha king's minister, who had come from this land. He was full of good qualities, charming, widely travelled and an expert businessman. His father-in-law honoured him with much property. In the course of time his wife became pregnant.

"Ratnodbhava was keen to see his brothers. Somehow getting his father-in-law to agree, he boarded a ship with his bright-eyed wife and set out for Pushpapurī. But the ship was assailed by enormous waves and sank in the sea.

"I had been engaged as a nurse for that lady who was already heavy with child. Holding her up with both hands, I climbed upon a log of wood and was lucky enough to reach the shore. Whether Ratnodbhava drowned together with the others, or whether he was somehow saved I do not know. But Suvrittā, who had suffered excessively, today gave birth to a son in the middle of this forest. Senseless after the agony of labour, she is lying under the cool shade of a tree. We cannot stay in this lonely forest, and I am trying to find the way to some habitation. I have brought along the child as it would not have been proper to leave him with her in her present condition."

'A wild elephant appeared at that very moment. The old woman took fright on seeing it and fled, dropping the child. I hid in a nearby

bush covered with creepers, observing the scene. As the elephant swept up the child from the ground like a morsel of young leaves, a lion leapt upon it with a loud roar. The frightened elephant flung the child upwards in a swift motion. But the little boy has a long life. He was caught by a monkey sitting above on the branch of a tree. Discovering that he was not an edible fruit, the monkey placed him on the branch and went away. The lion also went away after killing the elephant.

‘The child was strong and endured all this torment. Coming out of the bush, I brought him down carefully and searched for his nurse in the forest. Unable to find her, I took him to my guru to whom I explained everything. On his instructions I have brought the boy to Your Majesty.’

The king marvelled greatly at the absence of good luck which had affected all his friends at the same time. Deeply concerned about what had happened to Ratnodbhava, he named his son Pushpodbhava. Then, recounting the tale to Susruta, he handed his nephew to him with mixed feelings of relief and sorrow.

On the following day Vasumati came to her husband holding another boy to her breast. Asked from where he had come, she said: ‘O King, last night a heavenly being awakened me from sleep and, placing this boy before me, said humbly: “Madam, I am the wife of your minister Dharma Pala’s son Kāma Pāla. My name is Tārāvali and I am the daughter of Mani Bhadra the Yaksha.⁵ This is my child. I have brought him on the command of the lord of the Yakshas to serve your son Rājavāhana who is destined to be the king of the sea-girt earth, and an ocean of pure fame. Please look after this lovely boy.” I was astonished, but duly greeted the beautiful-eyed Yakshi who then disappeared.’

Rājahamsa was also surprised to learn of Kāma Pāla’s union with a Yaksha maiden. Summoning his minister, the genial Sumitra, he handed over to him his brother’s son after naming the boy Artha Pāla.

Subsequently, one of Vāmadeva’s disciples who lived in his hermitage brought another boy to the king. He was as delicate as a flower and his beauty put that of the god of love to shame. ‘Sire,’ said the disciple, ‘I had gone on a pilgrimage to the banks of the river Kāverī, where I saw this curly-haired little boy in the arms of an old woman who was weeping.

“Grandmother,” I said to the woman, “who are you and whose eyes does this child gladden? Why have you come to this forest, and for

what do you weep?"

'Wiping her tears with both hands, she told me the reason for her lamentations, almost as if I had the power to pluck out the thorn of her grief. "Noble one," she said, "Satya Varmā, the younger son of King Rājahamsa's minister Sita Varmā, came to this land on the pretext of pilgrimage. Here he married a Brahmin girl named Kālī from a village of Brahmins. As she proved barren, he then married her sister, the golden-hued Gaurī, from whom he had a son. I am the child's nurse. Kālī was jealous, and one day she threw us into this river by trickery.

"Holding up the child with one arm and swimming with the other, I caught hold of the branch of a tree which was being carried in the river's current. As we were swept along, I was bitten by a snake coiled on the same branch. I was able to guide the tree to the shore nearby, but when the snake's venom has killed me this child will be left helpless in the forest. That is why I weep."

'Then all her limbs were overcome by the noxious flames of serpent venom, and she fell to the ground. I was deeply moved. Unable to relieve her agony by incantations, I went to nearby bushes to look for medicinal herbs. But on my return I saw that she was dead.

'With great sadness I cremated the woman, and took this homeless child. It is not possible for me to find Satya Varmā as I did not learn the name of his village. Considering that you alone can now be the protector of your minister's son, I have brought him to Your Majesty.'

Distressed that Satya Varmā's whereabouts were unknown, the king handed over to his minister Sumati the son of his younger brother whom he named Soma Datta. Sumati looked after him as if his own brother had returned.

Thus was the group of princes assembled. Engaging with them in childish sports, and riding many kinds of mounts, Rājavāhana underwent successively the ritual tonsure, the investiture with the sacred thread and other sacramental ceremonies. Then began their studies.

They learnt all the scripts and the different languages. They were schooled in the Vedas with their six branches, in the Purāna scriptures and the epics, and in literature including poetry, drama, prose and fiction. They studied the treatise on law, grammar, logic, astronomy and all the other sciences. They were versed in the statecraft of Kautilya and Kāmandakī.⁶ They gained proficiency in the fine arts including music and dance; the esoteric arts of using gems, incantations, medicines and suchlike; the skills of riding elephants,

horses and other mounts; the usage of different types of weapons; and the mature understanding of gaming, thievery and other trickeries.

Acquiring a sound knowledge of all these subjects from their teachers, and tireless in the execution of their duties, the princes shone in the glory of youth. The king was supremely delighted to observe them, convinced that he was undefeatable by any enemy.

The Brahmin's Tale

One day the sage Vāmadeva, accompanied by the princes, visited the king. The youths had become proficient in all the arts and treated each other like brothers. In beauty they outshone the god of love, and in daring the god of war. Their hands bore the signs of the banner, the parasol and the thunderbolt. It was clear that they would vanquish all their opponents in the future.

The sage's feet, brushed by the princes' dark locks as they bowed to him, were like a pair of lotus flowers amidst black bees. Embracing the lads, he accepted the king's salutations and blessed him in a few candid words. 'Majesty,' he said, 'your son is now in the full flush of youth and beauty. Adored by his friends, he is indeed the fruit of all that you desired. The time has now come for him to commence a tour of conquest together with his companions. Rājavāhana can endure all hardships and you should arrange his departure on such a journey.'

The princes were like the god of love in splendour, like Rāma¹ in prowess, and swifter than the wind. Their displeasure could destroy all enemies. The prospect of their setting forth on a warlike enterprise roused the king's hopes. At an auspicious time he dispatched the prince Rājavāhana and his friends on the victory mission after giving them appropriate advice and charging the other princes to assist his son.

Observing omens that boded well on the way, Rājavāhana had traversed a part of the land when he reached the middle of the Vindhya forest. There he saw a man whose fierce eyes and iron-hard battle-scarred body indicated a Kirāta warrior, but who also wore the sacred thread of the Brahmins. He greeted Rājavāhana, who said: 'Sir, this terrible deserted tract in the middle of the Vindhya forest is fit only for beasts. Why do you live here alone? The sacred thread on your shoulder points to a Brahmin connection, but your scars are like those of the Kirātas. How is this?'

The man had already learnt of Rājavāhana's name and lineage from his companions, and concluded that his powerful personality was not one of an ordinary man. 'Prince,' he replied, 'there are many in this forest who call themselves Brahmins. But they have given up the Vedas and other sacred studies, abandoned their family traditions, and put aside the observance of truth, purity and other religious injunctions. They have taken instead to a life of sin, in subjection to the Sabaras whose salt they eat. I am the son of one of those people. My name is Matanga and my ways were reprehensible. I used to go with the Kiratas into villages, abduct the rich people and their women and children, keep them captive in the forest, and rob them ruthlessly of their wealth.

'Once, when my comrades were about to kill a Brahmin in the forest, I was moved to compassion. "You sinners," I told them, "a Brahmin should never be killed." They were furious and berated me strongly. Unable to bear their harsh words, I fought with them for a long time to protect that man, but eventually they killed me.

'Then I arrived in the nether world where I saw Shamana, the god of death, sitting on a gem-encrusted throne in his assembly, surrounded by men with earthly bodies. I saluted him with a prostration and, on seeing me, he summoned his minister Chitra Gupta and said to him: "Minister, it is not yet time for this one to die. His ways were indeed condemnable, but he lost his life for the sake of a Brahmin. His sins are now forgiven, and his mind will incline towards good deeds in the future. Let him be returned to his former body after he has seen the special tortures to which the worst sinners are subjected here.'

'Chitra Gupta then showed me those who were being tied to red-hot iron pillars, thrown into vast cauldrons of boiling oil, beaten with rods till their limbs shattered, or cut into bits with sharp saws. Exhorting me to virtue, he then released me.

'I found myself in my former body, lying on a rock in the forest, and being examined by the Brahmin who had treated me with a cold compress. I lay there for a while. Then my kinsmen, who had heard of my fate, arrived in haste, took me home, and treated my wounds.

'The grateful Brahmin taught me how to read, educated me in different scriptures, and instructed me in virtuous conduct which eradicates sin. He initiated me in the worship of the god Siva, who is crested with the crescent moon and knowable only through the path of wisdom. Finally he accepted my offerings and went away.

'Since then I have given up the company of the Kiratas, and of my

kinsmen who associate with them. Meditating upon the moon-crested Siva, the primal guru of all the worlds, I live in this forest, far away from evil. But, Sire, there is a secret that I must tell you. Please come with me.'

Then, taking the prince aside to a secluded place, he continued: 'O King, last night Siva came to me in a dream. Awakening me, that god of happy aspect said as I bowed before him: "Mātanga, on the banks of a river flowing in the depths of the Daṇḍakāranya forest there is a lingam² of crystal, worshipped by gods and sages. Behind it, near a rock marked with the footprints of the goddess Pārvatī, there is an opening in the ground, a gateway of destiny. Enter it, and take the copper tablet kept inside. Then follow the instructions given on it, and you will become the master of the nether world. A prince will come today or tomorrow to assist you in this enterprise." The arrival of Your Highness has occurred in accordance with the god's command. Now you must help me.'

Rajavahana accepted Matanga's respectful request and went away with him to the other forest while his companions slept at night. They were deeply concerned at not seeing him the next morning. Unable to find him despite a careful search in the forest, they remained steadfast and decided to go to other countries to continue looking for him. Agreeing on a place where they would meet again, they separated from each other and proceeded on their journeys.

As for Mātanga, he was more than content with having the protection of an unequalled warrior like the prince. Approaching the cave indicated by the moon-crested god, he entered it without hesitation and, taking the copper tablet, went on to Rasātala, the nether world, by the same path. There, by the side of a lake full of water birds in a pleasure garden near a town, he prepared a sacrificial fire in accordance with the god's commandments on the copper tablet while Rājavāhana stood guard. Then, as the fire flamed with fuel and oblations, and the prince watched in astonishment, he cast himself into the conflagration with appropriate incantations, and re-emerged from it with a shining body, brilliant as a flash of lightning.

Meanwhile, a bejewelled maiden appeared upon the scene. She was like a jewel among the world's lovely women. Followed by numerous attendants, she approached the Brahmin gracefully like a swan, and presented a bright gem to him. On being asked who she was, she replied softly in a sweet voice with hands joined in a salutation: 'Best of Brahmins, I am Kālindī, daughter of the king of the demons. My father was the powerful ruler of this world. While engaged in

defeating the gods in a battle, he was slain by the god Vishnu who found his valour unbearable.

‘I was plunged in grief,’ continued the maiden. ‘Seeing me in that condition a kind and accomplished ascetic told me: “Child, a man with a radiant body will be your new husband and rule over the whole of Rasātala.” Since that prophecy I have long awaited you, like the Chātaka³ bird waits with uplifted face for rain after she hears the sound of thunder. Now my longing has borne fruit with Your Honour’s arrival. Learning of it, I have come to you with the consent of the counsellors who administer my kingdom, and with a heart impelled by love. Please accept the sovereignty of this world and myself as your bride.’

Overjoyed at acquiring an excellent match, Mātanga married the maiden, accepted the kingdom of Rasātala with Rājavāhana’s permission, and lived happily ever after.

But Rājavāhana, who had deserted his companions in coming to Rasātala, was anxious to see them again and continue his travels on earth. Matanga was grateful for his help, and gave him the gem received from Kālindī which protected the wearer from suffering hunger and thirst. He also escorted Rājavāhana to the path of the cave, through which the latter came out on the surface.

Not finding his friends, Rājavāhana wandered from place to place by himself. One day, while he was resting in a park on the outskirts of a village, he saw a man coming there in a litter, accompanied by a woman and surrounded by attendants. The man cried out with delight: ‘That is my master, Rājavāhana, the pure and famous ornament of the lunar line!’ Saying, ‘What unexpected good luck that I have found him!’ and ‘What joy for my eyes!’ he sprang out of the litter, rushed with obvious pleasure towards Rājavāhana who also advanced a few steps. Then the newcomer touched Rājavāhana’s feet with his forehead, scattering blossoms from the garland of jasmine flowers that he wore. The prince, on his part, embraced him tightly, exclaiming, ‘O gentle Soma Datta!’ Then, his eyes brimming with tears of joy, Rājavāhana sat with his friend under the cool shade of a nutmeg tree, and said tenderly: ‘Comrade, how and in which country have you been all this time? Where are you going now, and who is this young woman? Tell me, how did you acquire all these attendants?’

Soma Datta was greatly relieved to see his friend. With clasped hands he began humbly to recount his adventures.

The Tale of Soma Datta

Soma Datta said: ‘Sire, I travelled through the forest seeking to serve at your feet. Parched with thirst, I was drinking water at a cool, creeper-shaded river, when I saw a bright jewel lying there. Picking it up I went some distance, but the sun was extremely hot and I could not go any further. So I entered a temple in the same forest, and saw an old wretched Brahmin there with many children. Feeling sorry for him, I asked about his welfare.

‘The Brahmin’s face was clouded by poverty. It lit up with hope, and he said: “Sir, I look after these motherless children in whatever way I can. At present I beg in this inhospitable land to feed them, and live in this very Śiva temple.’

‘An army seemed encamped in the forest. “Lord,” I asked, “whose is this army? Of which country is its master the king? What is his name, and why has he come here?” The Brahmin replied: “Gentle one, the ruler of this country is Vīraketu whose daughter is a gem among maidens, named Vāmalochanā. Hearing repeatedly of her extraordinary beauty, Mattakāla, the lord of the Lāta country, ¹ asked for her hand. When his request was ignored he besieged Vīraketu’s capital. The latter then took fright and presented his daughter to Mattakala as a gift. The lord of Lāta is pleased at his acquisition but has decided to wed her in his own capital. On his way home he is at present camped in this forest for hunting.

“Camped at another place is Vīraketu’s minister, Mānapāla, who has been appointed by the maiden’s father with much honour and equipped with treasure and a complete army. Distressed by the humiliation of his master, he has created dissensions within Mattakāla’s forces.”

‘This old, poor and learned Brahmin with many children seemed suitable for my charity. With a sympathetic heart I gave him the jewel that I had found. His face bloomed with joy and he blessed me again

and again before going away.

“Tired with travel, I fell asleep. After some time the Brahmin appeared again, this time surrounded by many swordsmen, his arms tied behind his back, and with marks of the whiplash on his body. He pointed to me, saying “This is the thief!”

“The soldiers released the Brahmin. I told them fearlessly how I had found the jewel. But, unmindful of my pleas, they bound me tightly with cords and took me to the prison. There, showing me others in chains, and saying, “These are your comrades,” they also put fetters on my feet.

“I suffered pangs of despair, not knowing what to do. At last I asked the others: “You men seem brave and hardened. Why are you being subjected to the pains of imprisonment? They said you are my comrades. What does this mean?”

“Seeing my condition, they told me the story of the lord of Lata which I had earlier heard from the Brahmin. “Sir,” they said, “we are the servants of Viraketu’s minister Mānapāla. On his instructions we tunnelled our way into the lord of Lāta’s apartment at night with the intention of murdering him. But we were frustrated as the king was not there. So we stole much treasure and came to the forest.

“On the following day we were surrounded and arrested, along with the treasure, by the officers who had followed our trail. They bound us securely and brought us to this place. When the stolen goods were inspected, one priceless jewel was missing, for which we were sentenced to death. But we are being kept in chains till that jewel is retrieved.”

“Having heard about this jewel of jewels, I concluded that it was the same as the one I had found. I then told them about my gift to the Brahmin which had led to my present condition, together with my name, lineage, and my travels. Conversing thus we became friends. At midnight we broke each others’ fetters, and they followed me out of the prison. Taking the weapons of the guards sleeping at the gate, we routed others who confronted us in the town, and reached the camp of Mānapāla. He greeted me cordially after hearing from his servants about my family and my valour that night.

“The next day some men sent by Mattakāla came to Mānapāla and said harshly: “Minister, some bandits who broke into our king’s apartment through a tunnel and stole much treasure have entered your camp. Surrender them, otherwise it will be very bad for you.” On hearing this the minister’s eyes flashed with anger. “Who is the lord of Lāta?” he shouted at them. “What is his friendship? What do I gain by

serving that wretch?" They reported Mānapāla's rebuke in his very words to Mattakāla.

"The lord of Lāta was incensed. But, proud of his own prowess, he set forth to fight with only a small force. The worthy Mānapāla had decided on a battle from the beginning, and advanced fearlessly with well-prepared warriors. I also followed the minister who was confident that the enemy could be destroyed with my valour. Earlier he had with great respect provided me with several horses and a chariot, a clever charioteer, strong armour, a suitable bow and a pair of quivers with different types of arrows. Taking these and other appropriate weapons, I got ready for the engagement.

"The two armies were fired by mutual hostility into a fierce battle. By passing both I began to attack the enemy with a shower of arrows released by my strong arms. Then, taking my chariot swiftly near the lord of Lata, and quickly overtaking him, I cut off the enemy's head. With his fall his remaining soldiers ran away. The minister was delighted to take possession of many elephants, horses and other goods, and extended all kinds of honours to me.

"The king was gratified at learning of all these events from the messengers sent by Manapala, and marvelled at my prowess. He came forth to welcome me and, with the consent of his ministers and kinsmen, married his daughter to me with great ceremony on an auspicious day. I was also installed as his heir apparent. Keeping him well pleased, I enjoyed all kinds of pleasures with Vamaloचना here. But separation from Your Highness was like a thorn in my heart. On the instructions of a sage I came today with my wife to pray to the great god Śiva in this shrine of Mahākāla which is known to grant meetings with old friends. And, by the mercy of the compassionate Śiva, I have obtained the pleasure of seeing your person.'

After hearing Soma Datta's account, Rājavāhana praised his valour and bemoaned the fate which had led to his imprisonment even though he was innocent. He then told him about his own adventures.

While they were talking, Rājavāhana was wonder-struck to see Pushpodbhava saluting him. Embracing the newcomer tightly and shedding tears of joy, he said to his other friend: 'O here is Pushpodbhava, gentle Soma Datta!' The two also embraced each other, freed from the pain of long separation. Seating the new arrival respectfully under the shade of the same tree, Rajavahana told him with a smile: 'Comrade, I had to do the Brahmin's work. Knowing for certain that my friends would stop me if they got to know about it, I went away while you all were asleep. On waking up, what did you all

decide, and where did you search for me? And you, sir, where did you go alone?’

With hands clasped and raised to his forehead, Pushpodbhava then humbly began his tale.

The Tale of Pushpodbhava

‘Sire,’ said Pushpodbhava, ‘though your friends were certain that you had gone to help the Brahmin, they could not come to any conclusion about where you may have gone. Therefore they dispersed to search for you in different directions.

‘One day, while travelling in search for you, I sat down for a while in the cool shade of a tree at the foot of a hill to escape the heat of the midday sun. All of a sudden the shadow of a human being with all the limbs pulled in like a tortoise appeared before me. Looking up, I beheld a man falling as it were from the sky at great speed. I was moved and caught him even as he fell, and slowly lowered him to the ground. The long fall had made him lose consciousness, and the shock had filled his eyes with tears. Reviving him with some cold water, I asked him how he had come to fall from the hilltop.

‘Wiping his tears, he said: “Gentle one, I am the son of Padmodbhava, the minister of the ruler of Magadha. Ratnodbhava is my name. I had gone for trading to the island of Kāla Yavana where I married a merchant’s daughter. While returning with her, our ship was wrecked not far from the shore and all aboard were drowned. A favourable fate somehow brought me to the shore, but I remained plunged in an ocean of grief at the loss of my wife. For the last sixteen years I have lived trusting in the prediction of a certain sage that I will find my wife again after that time. But, seeing no end to my sorrow, I decided today to leap to my death from the hill.”

‘At this very time I heard a woman’s cry: “This is not right. You should not jump into the fire just because of the pain of separation, when the sage has already predicted that you will be united with your husband and your son.”

‘Having heard the man, I knew in my heart that he was my father. “Dearest,” I told him, “there is much to explain to you. But I will later tell you all. Just now I must not ignore that woman’s cry. Please wait

here for a while.”

‘Hurrying a little further, I saw a woman with her hands clasped together, about to leap recklessly into a terrible blazing fire. I pulled her back swiftly from the flames and took her to my father, together with the old woman who had been crying. “Tell me,” I asked the old woman, “from where have you two come? And why are you going through this ordeal in the forest?”

“Son” replied the crone in a trembling voice, “this is the daughter of Kala Gupta, a merchant of Kāla Yavana island. Her name is Suvrittā. She was travelling with her husband Ratnodbhava when their ship sank in the sea. I am her nurse. We held on to a log of wood and providence got us to the shore. Then she went into labour and gave birth to a son in the forest. Because of my bad luck a wild elephant took the child away. We wandered in the forest where a sage told her that she would be reunited with her husband and her son after sixteen years. With faith in those words we have spent all that time in a holy hermitage. But now, unable to bear her grief any longer, she was prepared to offer her body to the flaming fire.”

‘Hearing her, I realized that this was my own mother. Prostrating myself before her, I told her my entire story. Then I showed her my father, smiling and wide-eyed with astonishment as he listened to the nurse.

‘My parents recognized each other through mutual signs. Delighted, they showered my humble self with tears of joy, sniffed my head¹ and embraced me tightly. We then sat in the shade of a tree.

‘My father asked me how King Rājahamsa was. I recounted the loss of his kingdom, your birth, the coming together of the princes, the commencement of your tour of victory, your going with Mātanga, and our search for you. Thereafter I established them in the hermitage of a certain sage.

‘Sire, I remained devoted to my search for you. Considering that everything needs money, I was able, by your grace, to prepare a group of competent and helpful people from among the sage’s disciples. We went to the ruins of an old city in the middle of the Vindhya forest. With the help of a special ointment I was able to identify trees which had all kinds of treasures and pots of money buried beneath them. Putting guards around them, I organized diggings with appropriate implements and collected immense numbers of gold dinar coins.

‘A caravan of merchants had arrived meanwhile and camped not far from us. I went to them and purchased some strong bullocks and a cart on the pretence of carrying other goods. Then I loaded the

treasure on the cart and brought it slowly to their camp.

‘The leader of the caravan was a merchant’s son named Chandra Pāla. I struck up a friendship with him and accompanied him to Ujjayinī. ² Later I also brought my parents to that city. Chandra Pāla’s father was a merchant of many accomplishments named Bandhu Pāla. He took me to see the King of Mālava with whose permission I began to live in Ujjayini without revealing my identity.

‘Bandhu Pāla became my great friend. Once, on hearing that I was preparing to search for you in the forest, he told me: “Sir, this earth is endless and you cannot search everywhere. Sit back and relax. I will investigate and tell you of some lucky omens which may enable you to meet your master.” Assured by his kind words, I began to spend time in his company every day.

‘One day I saw a jewel of a girl, a veritable goddess of the merchant community. Her name was Bālachandrika. Her face was glorious like the moon, and her eyes were full of moonlight. The flush of youth pervaded all her limbs. Her beauty shook my composure and I became there and then a target for the god of love’s flower arrow. She also let loose at me the shaft of love with sidelong glances of her fawnlike eyes, and tremulous motions like a creeper touched by the breeze. Her gestures and looks, reflecting both modesty and desire, expressed her feelings for me. I discerned the bent of her mind from these clever, secret signs and began to think of means for arranging a spontaneous meeting.

‘On a later occasion I went with Bandhu Pāla to a park near the city. He wished to locate Your Highness’ whereabouts through omens, and stood under a tree listening to the cries of the birds. I wandered about for recreation. Coming to another park, I saw the one object of my desires, Balachandrikā, by the side of a lake with worried looks and a downcast mien.

‘For a moment I enjoyed the marvellous play of affection, modesty and confusion on her lotus-like face. Then I realized the sadness and the pain of longing it concealed. Wishing to know the cause, I went up to her and said: “My beauty, tell me, why are you looking so downcast?”

‘Confidence that we were alone overcame her bashfulness, and she said softly: “Gentle sir, Mānasāra, the King of Mālava has become very old. He anointed his son Darpasara as his successor here in Ujjayinī. That prince has gone away to pray on Mount Kailāsa, leaving the task of ruling this vast empire to the two terrible sons of his aunt, Chanda Varmā and Dāru Varmā. While the former rules the kingdom

undisputed, Dāru Varmā disregards the orders of his uncle and elder brother, and commits crimes like seizing the women and wealth of others. He saw me one day and, unmindful of the sin of violating a virgin, is attempting to take me by force. This is what troubles me, whose heart has already been captivated by your charm.”

“Thus I learnt of her state of mind and love for me. I realized also the obstacle to the fulfilment of my desires, and considered means for eliminating Dāru Varmā. Assuring my tearful beloved, I said, “Young lady, I have thought of an easy way of destroying that wicked man who is after you. Let it be known in town though reputable people who are your confidantes, that Balachandrika has been possessed by a Yaksha. Further, that a sage has said that if anyone desirous and worthy of her is brave enough to go to her bedchamber, vanquish the Yaksha, and return safely after conversing with her and her girlfriend, he will have that maiden with the beautiful breasts as his bride.”

‘After hearing this if Dāru Varmā does nothing out of fear, so much the better. But if he is base enough to accept such conditions, your confidantes should further tell him: “Gentle Sir, you are King Darpasāra’s minister. It will not be proper for you to do such a daring deed in our friend’s house. You should instead conduct her publicly to your own palace and, if you emerge safe after sporting with her, you can then marry that lotus-eyed damsel and fulfil all your wishes.”

‘He will accept this. You should then go to his palace with me, disguised as your girlfriend. When he is alone I will kill him with swift blows of my feet, knees and fists. Then I will follow you out without any difficulty in the guise of your companion. Do agree to this, and tell your parents and close relations without any fear or shame about our great love for each other. Persuade them in every way to let us get married. They will certainly agree, seeing my family, wealth, beauty and age. Please explain to them the means for killing Dāru Varmā and let me have their reply.

‘Her face bloomed like a lily. “Beloved,” she said, “you alone are capable of slaying the wicked Dāru Varmā. When he is dead all your wishes can bear fruit. So, do it. I too will act according to whatever you have said.” Then she went home slowly, looking back at me again and again.

‘On my part, I returned to Bandhu Pāla and heard from that expert in omens that I would meet Your Highness after three days. I then followed him back, he to his house and I to mine.

‘Dāru Varmā fell into the trap that I had laid. He invited Balachandrikā to sport with him in his pleasure-chamber. Getting

ready to go, she sent a messenger-maid to me. I too donned a nice disguise, with bejewelled anklets and bangles, bracelets and earrings, girdle and necklace and other feminine adornments, all expertly put on in appropriate places. I then approached the gate of Dāru Varmā's mansion with my beloved.

‘On our being announced by the gatekeeper, Dāru Varmā received us with due respect and ceremony. Stopping the remainder of our retinue at the gate itself, he conducted Bālachandrikā and myself to the appointed chamber. Meanwhile the story of the Yaksha had spread in the city, and drawn by it, many curious citizens gathered at Dāru Varmā's gate.

‘Passion had made him lose all discrimination. The darkness of night, and my attractive feminine garb, prevented him from noticing my sex. He seated Bālachandrikā on a gem-studded bed of gold, covered with a swan-white eiderdown, and offered us jewelled ornaments, fragrant flowers and betel leaves scented with musk, camphor and green sandalwood. For a little while we exchanged pleasantries.

‘Then, in the blindness of passion, he decided to fondle Bālachandrikā's breasts. I saw red. Throwing him down from the bed, I attacked him without hesitation with blows from my fists, knees and feet. Later, readjusting my ornaments which had been dishevelled by the violence of the fight, and reassuring the girl who was trembling with fear, I came out into the courtyard and screamed as if in terror: “Alas, Dāru Varmā is being killed by the terrible Yaksha who has possessed Bālachandrikā! Come quickly and see!”

‘Hearing this the people assembled outside rushed in, weeping with deafening shouts. They started telling each other: “Dāru Varmā knew that Bālachandrikā was possessed by a powerful Yaksha. Despite this he sought her blindly. What will be served by mourning for him? His own deeds have killed him.”

‘In the tumult I came out quickly with that bright-eyed girl and went to my house. After a few day I wedded her publicly with due ceremonies and enjoyed in full measure all the pleasures of love I had earlier imagined. Today was the day indicated by Bandhu Pala's omens. I came out of the city and now am experiencing the joy of seeing Your Highness.’

Rajavahana was pleased to hear his friend's story, and told him in turn about his own and Soma Datta's adventures. He asked Soma Datta to take his wife and family home after their prayers to the lord of Mahākāla, and then to come to him. Meanwhile, attended by

Pushpodbhava, he entered the city of Avantikā, ³ which is like heaven on earth.

Pushpodbhava introduced him in the city as a Brahmin proficient in all the arts, but to Bandhu Pāla and his other friends he made it known that this was his master's son. They welcomed him in every way, and Pushpodbhava arranged for his stay in his own house.

The Wedding of Avanti Sundarī

The season of spring arrived. It was heralded by that leader of the god of love's army, the soft southern breeze. The serpents who live in the trees of the southern Malaya mountains inhale this breeze, which makes it exceedingly light. It is perfumed with the fragrance of green sandalwood, and fans the flames of desire in the hearts of separated lovers.

The hum of bees and the song of nightingales feeding on the nectar of mango blossoms filled the air. The hearts of proud maidens were filled with longing. Gallants yearned to celebrate the festival of love. Buds sprouted on the tilaka and the sinduvara, the flame of the forest and the red aśoka trees. ¹

In this enchanting season, Avanti Sundarī, the daughter of King Mānasāra, went with her dear friend Bālachandrikā to amuse herself in a beautiful garden near the city. Sporting with a bevy of elegant ladies who had accompanied her from the capital, she worshipped the god of love with incense and flowers, tumeric and rice grains, fine Chinese silk and many scented unguents, on a sandy strip under the cool shade of a young mango tree.

Avanti Sundarī was the very image of Rati, the consort of the god of love. Eager to see her, Rājavāhana also went to that garden escorted by Pushpodbhava.

He came with the spring, as does Kama. The mango trees were covered with florets and new leaves. Their branches rustled in the southern breeze, full of the murmuring of bees and the warbling of nightingales and flocks of parrots. Hosts of cranes and swans, ducks and geese, frolicked in the clear and cool waters of the lakes amidst clusters of pink, blue and white lilies, just beginning to bloom. Pausing from time to time to observe this delightful scene, he gradually approached the princess. Finally, on a signal from Bālachandrikā to come forward without hesitation, Rājavāhana,

whose splendour exceeded that of Indra,² stood before the slender Avanti Sundarī.

She was as if Kāma had created a very special woman in his quest to find a playmate for Rati. Her feet had the hue of autumnal lilies in his pleasure-pool. Her gait was languorous like the swan in his lake garden. Her calves had the elegance of his arrow-quivers, and her shapely thighs that of the plantain stems at his temple gate. Like his splendid victory chariot were her deep-set loins, and like the hollow in a half open lotus in the river Ganga's eddies was her navel, an ornament of delight. The faint line of down descending into it had the blue gleam of Kāma's bow string.

Her bosom had the splendour of two brimming golden bowls, her arms the suppleness of entwined creepers, and her throat the graceful curve of the conchshell. Her lips reflected the redness of tender new mango leaves. Like Kāma's flower-arrow was her innocent smile, and like his herald, the nightingale, her sweet voice. Her breath was as fragrant as the southern breeze.

Her eyes flashed under arched brows like the fish insignia on Kāma's victory banner. His friend the moon's radiance shone from her face. Her hair was lustrous like peacock feathers. She glowed as if the god of love had brushed his creation with the dust of camphor after washing it with the essence of flowers, sandalwood and musk.

It seemed to the Princess of Mālava that the god of love, to whom she had been praying for a husband of her choice, had himself appeared before her to grant her wish. Seeing Rājavāhana, she trembled with anticipation like a vine touched by a gentle breeze. A multitude of emotions arose within her as she ceased her playful activity with embarrassment.

'Such loveliness could certainly not have been the result of deliberate design when the Creator made womankind,' thought Rājavāhana, as he gazed upon her with wonder and delight. 'If that lotus-born god was such an expert, why could he not create other maidens of equal beauty?' She, on her part, modestly took cover a little behind her companions, all the while looking with sidelong glances straight into his eyes. Rājavāhana's comeliness was for her, it seemed like the snare for a gazelle. He also became a victim of Kāma's arrows, made sharp by the host of emotions she aroused in him.

'Who is this extraordinarily handsome person?' she thought. 'In which city live the lucky girls whose eyes feast upon him? Who among the virtuous matrons is exalted by calling him "son"? Does he have a mistress? Why has he come here? His beauty shames Kāma who has

become envious and, true to his name,³ churns my heart as I behold this man. What shall I do? How can I know more about him?’

The perceptive Bālachandrikā grasped what was going on in the minds of both. Considering that it would not be proper to reveal the prince’s history before all the ladies, she said casually: ‘Princess, this is a young Brahmin, versed in all the arts and proficient in war. He is moreover an expert in gemology, medicine and incantations, and able to invoke the gods. He deserves respectful treatment and you should honour him.’

The princess had been stirred by Kāma, as the waves are by the wind. She was inwardly content to hear Bālachandrikā express what was her own wish. Seating the prince on an appropriate seat, she honoured him with incense and flowers, rice grains, camphor, betel leaf and other articles assembled by her companions.

Rājavāhana thought: ‘She was certainly my wife Yajñavati in my previous birth. Otherwise such love would not have risen in my heart. The sage had told us both that we would remember our previous lives when the curse came to an end. Even so, I must say something particular to revive her memory after all this time.’

At that moment a handsome swan approached them playfully. The princess eagerly sent Bālachandrikā to catch it. Seizing this opportunity, the clever Rājavāhana said in a bantering tone: ‘Lady, once a king named Śāmba had gone on a pleasure-trip with his beloved wife to the lakeside. He caught a swan sleeping near a cluster of red lotuses and, gently tying its feet with a lotus stalk, he said to his beloved with a smile: “Beautiful one, look at the swan that I have caught. It is as still as a hermit at prayer. Now I will let it go.”

‘The swan was indeed a hermit at prayer. He cursed Śāmba: “O King, I was sitting with due rituals and ceremony in this lotus cluster, enjoying spiritual bliss. You have insulted me without cause, just because of your royal pride. For this sin, may you be afflicted with the grief of separation from your wife.”

‘Śāmba’s face fell. He could not bear separation from his beloved. Prostrating himself on the ground, he said humbly: “Sir, what I did was out of ignorance. Please forgive me.”

‘The sage was moved by compassion. “King,” he said, “the curse will not affect you in this life. But my word is infallible. In her next birth, when you again become the lover of this lotus-eyed lady, you will undergo the pain of separation from her for two months, with your feet in fetters, for the two minutes that you kept me bound. Thereafter may you enjoy your kingdom with your wife for a long time.” The

sage also blessed them both with the ability to remember their past birth. The moral is that you should not tie up this swan!’

On hearing this the princess also remembered her previous birth and realized that this was her lifelong love. Her heart bloomed with joy, but she said with a smile: ‘Gentle sir, Śāmba had tied up the swan at Yajñavatī’s insistence. This shows that even intelligent people do foolish things out of kindness!’

Thus did the princess and the prince come to know about each other’s previous births and identities. Recalling more incidents to each other, their hearts were filled with love.

At this stage the Queen of Mālava arrived with her attendants to watch her daughter at play. Seeing her from a distance, Bālachandrikā quickly signalled Rājavāhana and Pushpodbhava with her hand to hide in a grove of trees so that the secret of their presence was not revealed. The queen watched her daughter sporting with her friends for some time, and then got ready to go back to her palace with the princess.

As Avanti Sundarī followed her mother, she said to the swan, ‘O scion of the swan family, you came to play with me in this pleasure-garden. If I leave you suddenly it is only because I must go with my mother. Your feelings should not be affected by this.’ Thus addressing in fact the prince, whose father’s name⁴ also means a swan, she went home, looking back sadly again and again to say farewell.

On learning more from Bālachandrikā about her beloved, his family and deeds, the princess was ravaged by Kāma’s arrows. In the agony of separation she wasted away, night after night, like the waning moon. Forsaking meals and other daily routine, she tossed and turned on a bed of tender new leaves and flowers, moistened with the essence of sandalwood, in her solitary chamber.

Her companions were deeply troubled to see her in this condition, her delicate limbs smouldering with the fire of love. They prepared water for her bath, scented with green sandalwood, camphor and uśīra⁵ in a pitcher of gold, and collected many other objects for refreshing her person, like garments woven from lotus fibre and fans of lotus leaves. But, like water sprinkled on boiling oil, all these cooling agents served only to inflame her even more.

The dejected Bālachandrikā was at a loss as to what she could do. The princess looked at her tearfully from half-closed eyes. Her breath was hot. Her lips were dry. ‘Dear friend,’ she said to her in a choked voice, ‘they lie who say that the five arrows of Kāma are made of flowers. He is killing me with countless arrows of steel. I think that his

friend, the moon, burns more fiercely than the fire beneath the ocean floor. For, when it sets into the sea, the waters dry up and recede; and they expand only when it rises again. How can I describe the wicked moon? It causes even the blooming lotus to close, which is the home of its own sister, the goddess Lakshmi.

‘My heart is burning in the fire of separation. Even the southern breeze has turned hot and been stifled by its touch. Even this bed of new leaves sears my body like a flame, and green sandalwood sings it as if dipped in the venom of serpents who live coiled on its branches. So, enough of these coolants. The only physician who can cure this fever of love is that prince who has vanquished the god of love in comeliness. But I cannot have him. What can I do?’

Balachandrikā saw that her tender-limbed friend was bereft, her heart lost to Rājāvāhana’s beauty. The fever of love was at its height. She thought to herself: ‘I must bring the prince here quickly. Otherwise this love will be the end of her, and we will be left only with a memory. When they saw each other in the garden, Kāma had released his arrows on both. So it should be easy to persuade the prince.’ Then, appointing other capable friends to look after Avanti Sundarī, she went to where the prince was staying.

Rājāvāhana’s heart had also become a repository for the god of love’s arrows. He was sitting on a bed of new leaves blanched by contact with his burning limbs, talking to Pushpodbhava about his beloved. The arrival of her friend Bālachandrikā delighted him as if a much searched for medicinal herb had been discovered right under his feet. She saluted him with hands clasped like a lotus bud raised to her forehead, and he asked her to take a seat. Sitting down, she presented him the betel leaf with camphor sent by Avanti Sundarī and, on being asked about her, said humbly:

‘Sire, the princess is being tormented by Kāma ever since she saw you in the pleasure garden. She gets no relief from this fever even in beds strewn with flowers. Blinded by love, she yearns to embrace you. But that pleasure remains out of her reach like the fruit on a tall tree from a short person’s grasp. She instructed me to deliver to you this letter which she has herself written.’ The prince took the letter and read:

Having seen you, beloved,
my heart longs for you.
Your person is faultless
and delicate as a flower.
Do make your own heart

‘My friend,’ he told her respectfully, ‘you are the beloved of Pushpodbhava who is like my shadow. You are also as close to the doe-eyed Avanti Sundarī as her own breath. Your skill alone can prepare the ground for growing this plant of love. I will do all that you recommend for fulfilling my sweetheart’s wishes. She has spoken of the hardness of my heart. But she stole it away when I saw her in the garden, and knows herself how hard or tender it is. It is difficult to gain entrance to the inner apartments for girls. But I will make some suitable arrangement and meet her tomorrow or the day after. Please give her my message and see that she is caused no discomfort. For she is as delicate as an acacia flower.’

Bālachandrikā went back content with the message full of love. Rājavāhana, on his part, went with Pushpodbhava to seek distraction from the pangs of separation in the garden where he had first met his beloved. There he saw the trees from which she had gathered blossoms and young leaves; the cool sandy strip, still marked with her footprints, where she had prayed to the god of love; and the bed of petals beneath the spring-creeper where she had rested. The sound of Kāma’s spies, the parrots, the nightingales and the bees, filled his ears. Young mango shoots trembled in the breeze like flames. Remembering the emotions aroused in his heart when he first saw that jewel of a girl, Rājavāhana wandered in the garden, disturbed by Kāma and unable to rest.

A Brahmin suddenly arrived. He wore a fine, colourful robe. Gem-studded rings sparkled in his ears. His head was shaved, his appearance artful and appealing. Seeing the splendid Rājavāhana he gave a benediction.

‘Who are you, sir?’ Rājavāhana asked politely. ‘What is your business?’

‘My name is Vidyeśvara,’ he replied. ‘I am an expert in the science of illusion, and have travelled in many countries for the recreation of their rulers. I arrived in Ujjayinī today.’ Then, looking long at Rājavāhana, he enquired with a meaningful smile: ‘Why this pale face in this pleasure garden?’

Thinking that it may serve his purpose, Pushpodbhava said to him respectfully: ‘Friendship between decent people indeed begins with conversation. You, sir, have become our dear friend with your ever kind words. What is there to hide from friends? The daughter of the King of Mālava had come to this pleasure park for the spring festival.

By chance she and this prince saw each other and fell in love. He is in this condition as there are no means for consummating their love for all time.'

Vidyeshvara looked at the prince who was blushing with embarrassment, and said, smiling: 'Sire, what work of yours cannot be done when your servant is here? I will enchant the King of Mālava with my skills of illusion and, arranging his daughter's nuptials before all his subjects, I will enable you to enter the inner apartments. But the princess must be informed of this in advance through a confidante.'

The prince was delighted to gain an unexpected friend who was moreover an expert illusionist and well-acquainted with deception as well as love, both simulated and actual. He parted from Vidyeshvara with all courtesy, and returned with Pushpodbhava to his residence convinced that his wishes would be realized by the former's skills. Through Bālachandrikā he had his beloved informed of the plan devised by the Brahmin for their union. Wondering how he would pass the night, his heart filled with anticipation.

The next morning Vidyeshvara went with his troupe of accomplished actors and mimes to the portal of the royal palace and announced himself to the gatekeepers. They informed the King of Mālava at once with due ceremony that an illusionist had arrived.

The king and his eager ladies were filled with curiosity to see Vidyeshvara. Summoned inside, he entered the palace chamber and respectfully offered his benedictions. Permission having been given to begin the performance, the musicians struck up a tune on their instruments and the *chanteuses* commenced to sing sweetly like nightingales. Vidyeshvara himself began to whirl a fan of peacock feathers to attract the attention of the audience. Entrancing the king and his family, he stood silent for a moment with his eyes closed.

Soon many serpents appeared, spitting fearful venom and striking terror into every heart. The gems on their outspread hoods lit up the expanse of the palace. Next came many vultures which caught the enormous reptiles in their beaks and flew into the sky. The Brahmin then enacted the scene of the man-lion Narasimha tearing apart Hiranyakasipu, the demon king.

Addressing the astonished king afterwards, he said: 'O King, at the end it is proper that something auspicious is shown to Your Majesty. To maintain that tradition, a wedding can be arranged between a maiden resembling Your Majesty's daughter and a prince with all the attributes of good fortune.'

The king, curious to see this, gave his permission. Vidyēśvara beamed at the possibility of his plan materializing. Applying a special ointment to his eyes to bewitch the people, he looked around in all directions. Avanti Sundarī had meanwhile arrived by prior signal, her person ornamented with all kinds of jewellery. As the spectators watched and marvelled, thinking that this was another feat of illusion, Vidyēśvara performed her marriage to a delighted Rājavāhana with the appropriate rituals and incantations before the fire as the witness.

At the end of the performance, the Brahmin called out loudly: ‘May all the people created by illusion please go away!’ As the magic images disappeared one by one, Rājavāhana also acted like them, and entered the inner apartment of the princess as had been agreed secretly in advance. Avanti Sundarī, escorted by her attendants, followed her husband into her beautiful chamber. The King of Mālava also retired to his inner rooms after acknowledging the Brahmin’s amazing skill and dismissing him with a large fee.

Thus, with the help of fate and human endeavour, did Rājavāhana succeed in realizing his heart’s desire. When they were alone, he gradually dispelled the modest reserve of his doe-eyed darling with sweet and gentle efforts and rapt attention to her conversation. Building up her confidence in himself, he told her marvellous and gripping tales from all over the world, and attracted her to the pleasures of love.



DAŚA KUMĀRA CHARITAM

The Tale of Rajavahana

Wide eyed with wonder, she listened to his tales from all over the world. Her bosom covered her lover's chest like clouds that cover the sky during the rains. Her eyes, red-tinged like the plantain flower in full bloom, shone with desire. The flowers in her hair mocked the peacock's tail with its pattern of crescent moons.

'My love,' that best of women said with a smile, 'thanks to you my ears have been put to really good use tonight. The lamp of knowledge you lit has removed all the ignorance from my mind. Serving you has indeed borne fruit.

'What can I do to repay your favours? There is nothing of mine which is not yours. But I do have some powers. Without my permission no one can kiss your lips which have been tasted only by Sarasvati, the goddess of speech. And none can embrace your broad chest which has been clasped only to the bosom of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity.'

Impulsively she then kissed her lover's lips, ruddy as kadamba¹ buds. That rekindled their passion, and the game of love, enchanting with all its curious stratagems, commenced once again.

Later, fatigued by making love, they fell asleep. In a dream they saw an old swan, its feet tied with a lotus stalk. Both woke up with a start. Like lilies caught in a noose of moonlight, the prince's feet were fettered in a silver chain. 'What is it?' cried the princess, terrified. As realization dawned she burst loudly into tears. Following her, all the denizens of the inner apartments started to scream. Unmindful of the time and the need for discretion, they rolled on the ground, weeping and trembling, as if encircled by fire or attacked by ghouls. Hearing the tumult, the guards who had access to the inner apartments, rushed in shouting and saw the prince in that condition.

Such was the prince's dignity that they desisted from laying hands on him. But they went immediately and informed Chanda Varmā. He

was incensed. Looking as if he would burn them alive as he listened and remembered, he exclaimed: 'Is this that wretched Brahmin, that sly and secret devil? Proud of his beauty and skills, he wears the hypocrite's robe and impresses the foolish citizens with his false holiness by all kinds of deceitful tricks. Isn't he also the friend of that foreign merchant's son, Pushpodbhava, who puts on airs because of his money? He is the husband of that evil Bālachandrikā who was the cause of my younger brother's death.

'How is it that that vile Avanti Sundarī has fallen for that man, spurning even a lion like myself? She has besmirched the family's honour, the wretch. Well, she is going to see her husband atop the impaler's pike today itself.'

Shouting thus, his visage dark with anger, Chanda Varma caught hold of the prince in his arms, hard as rods of iron, and violently dragged him by his hands which bore the royal signs of the lotus and the wheel. But the prince was calm by nature, and the repository of all the manly virtues. He recognized that this adversity was fated, and there was no alternative but to bear it. Assuring Avanti Sundarī, who was ready to give up her life, he said: 'My swan, remember the story of the swan. Bear up for two months.' Then he surrendered himself to his adversary.

The King and Queen of Malava were deeply distressed on receiving this news. They supported their son-in-law and, by hinting that they might commit suicide, protected him from being put to death. But they did not anymore possess power to have him set free.

Chanda Varmā was relentless. He sent a report about the entire incident to Darpasāra who was engaged in prayers on Mount Kailāsa, and quickly threw Pushpodbhava and his family into prison after confiscating all their possessions. Rājavāhana he imprisoned, like a young lion, in a wooden cage. The prince survived there only because of the magic jewel concealed in his hair, the power of which protected him against hunger and thirst. Not trusting anyone to guard him, Chanda Varmā took him along on his campaign against Anga.²

King Simha Varmā of Anga had turned down Chanda Varmā's request for the hand of his daughter. To punish him Chanda Varmā invaded the Anga country and besieged its capital Champā with a mighty army. The Anga king was like a lion in valour. He had sent envoys to seek support from other kings. But even though the latter were coming with all haste and were expected shortly, he did not care to wait for them. Instead, like pride personified, he pierced his own fortifications, came out with great force and, consumed with rage,

threw himself upon the enemy.

A fierce battle commenced. Simha Varmā's army was decimated. He himself was attacked and wounded many times. Finally, with extraordinary prowess, Chanda Varmā leapt onto the King of Anga's elephant, and seized the king by force.

Greatly desirous of Simha Varmā's daughter Ambālikā, who was famous as a jewel among women, Chanda Varma did not deprive the Anga king of his life. But, true to his word, he cast him into prison after having his wounds treated. In consultation with the astrologers it was further decided that he should marry Ambālikā the very next morning.

As Chaṇḍa Varmā put on the nuptial bracelet in preparation for the marriage ceremony, a quick-footed messenger returned from Mount Kailāsa with the reply of King Darpaśāra. 'You fool,' it said, 'is this the time for showing any mercy to a violator of the women's inner apartments? The king³ is old, and age has destroyed his sense of honour and dishonour. If he babbles something in favour of that wanton, his daughter, should you simply fall in line? So regale my ears quickly with the news of that fiend's torture and execution. And that wicked girl and her younger brother Kīrtisāra should be put in chains and incarcerated.'

On receiving this message Chanda Varmā looked at the soldiers around him. 'Tomorrow itself,' he ordered, 'that despicable violator of the inner apartments should be produced before the palace gate. The king-elephant Chaṇḍapota should also be brought there, properly accoutered. After the wedding ceremony I will myself mount that beast and let it play with that rogue. After that I will go on the same elephant to arrest the kings who are coming to aid the enemy with their treasure and transport.'

The following day, at the first light of dawn, the guards took the prince to the royal courtyard. The elephant Chaṇḍapota, rut oozing from its temples, was already there. At that moment the silver chain fell from prince Rajavahana's feet. It turned into a celestial damsel, an apsara,⁴ glowing like moonlight, who circumambulated him and spoke with hands joined in salute.

The Tale of Surata Manjarī

'Sire, condescend to give me your attention. I am an apsara created from moonbeams, and my name is Surata Manjarī. In the sky once a greedy swan reached out for my face, mistaking it for a lotus flower.

In the hurry to ward it off, my necklace broke and fell by accident on the head of the sage Mārkaṇḍeya who was bathing below in a shallow Himalayan lake. He was enraged, and cursed that I would turn into the mindless category of metals. On being mollified, he ordained that this condition would last only for two months as fetters on your feet, and my senses would not be affected. Thus I was turned into a silver chain because of my transgression.

‘I was found on Mount Kailāsa by a celestial being, the vidyādhara⁵ Vira Śekhara, son of Mānasa Vega and grandson of King Vegavāna of the Ikshvaku dynasty. He took possession of me. He was on bad terms with his father and ill-disposed towards the supreme ruler of the vidyadharas, Naravāhana Datta, the scion of the kings of Vatsa. Thinking that Darpaśara alone had the power to harm Naravāhana Datta, he went to meet the former on Mount Kailāsa where he was praying. Darpaśara promised to give his sister Avanti Sundarī in marriage to Vira Śekhara.

‘Later, of an evening when clear moonlight filled the sky, Vira Śekhara was seized with the desire to see his future wife. Unable to control himself, he turned invisible by magic, and entered her inner apartments, which were as splendid as Indra’s palace. There he saw her lying in your arms, her limbs motionless with the fatigue of love. You were reviving her passion with the ambrosia of stories from all over the world.

‘He was very angry, but your majesty deterred him from attempting any drastic action. Fate nevertheless gave him sufficient courage to bind your feet with me, the silver chain, as you both slept happily in mutual embrace. Still angry, he then left immediately.

‘My curse has expired today. It also kept you in captivity for two months. Now, be happy, and tell me what I can do for you.’ As the apsara then saluted and took leave, Rājavāhana asked her to assure his beloved with his news.

At that very moment voices were heard: ‘He has been killed! Chaṇḍa Varmā had just stretched out his arm longing to take Ambālīkā’s hand when some desperado dragged him down and stabbed him dead with a dagger! He has killed many others also, and is roaming fearlessly in the palace.’

Hearing this, the prince pulled down the mahout of the elephant, climbed on to the rutting beast, and sped towards the palace. The elephant’s pace scattered the pedestrians, and cleared the way for them. Entering the palace, the prince called out in a voice deep as thunder: ‘Who is that noble person who has done this great deed,

difficult for any man to perform? Come forward and mount this rutting elephant with me. Whoever stands by me has nothing to fear, even if he challenges the gods and the demons.’

A man came forward joyfully, his hands joined in salute. He quickly mounted the elephant which had knelt down on a signal. ‘O this is my dear friend Apahāra Varmā!’ the prince cried out, looking carefully at the newcomer who sat behind him. He made him embrace his shoulders, and reached back to put his arms around his friend. Apahāra Varmā then turned on the warriors who had surrounded them, brandishing spears and darts, bows and discuses, clubs of iron and wood, as well as metal bars and plates. He felled many to the ground. The others, they saw, were overcome by another force of soldiers coming towards them.

Soon an officer approached them. Broad-chested and slim-waisted, he was of fair complexion, with large and liquid blue eyes and hair as dark as sapphires. He wore a silken dress and carried a bejewelled dagger at the waist. Showering arrows on the enemy with a practised hand, he prodded his elephant relentlessly under the ear with his toes to make it move faster. He seemed already to have been told about them. Saying: ‘This must be the lord Rājavāhana,’ he clasped his hands together and, fixing his gaze on Apahāra Varmā, added: ‘The kings are here to help the King of Anga. The enemy forces have been so wounded and defeated that even women and children can disarm them. What else should be done?’

‘Sire,’ Apahāra Varmā said happily, ‘condescend to look at this servant. He should be considered the same as myself, except that he has a different face and a separate name, Dhana Mitra. If there is no objection, he will release the King of Anga, and reassemble the scattered treasure and means of transport while Your Majesty retires for rest. Then he can present himself before you together with our other warriors.’

‘As you please,’ Rājavāhana replied, and followed the path suggested by his friend to a great banyan tree outside the town. The sandy ground beneath it was smooth as silk, and cool with breezes from the river Gangā. There he descended from the elephant and sat at ease by the river bank after he and Apahāra Varmā had levelled a space with their own hands.

While they rested, Dhana Mitra arrived with Upahāra Varmā, Artha Pāla, Pramati, Mitra Gupta, Mantra Gupta and Visruta. With them were King Prahāra Varmā of Mithilā, King Kāma Pāla of Kāśī and King Siṃha Varmā of Champā. Dhana Mitra saluted Rājavāhana who got

up, delighted, exclaiming: 'What, have all the friends come here? What joy!' He embraced them all after greeting them with appropriate courtesies and honouring the Kings of Kāśī, Mithilā and Anga like his own father. The kings embraced him, their white-haired heads trembling with emotion.

Then began a pleasant conversation. Asked by his comrades, Rājavāhana recounted his own adventures and those of Soma Datta and Pushpodbhava. He then proposed to hear their tales one by one, and asked them to start. The first to speak was Apahāra Varmā.

The Tale of Apahāra Varmā

Sire, after you had gone down the pit to the nether world to help the Brahmin your friends dispersed to search for you. I had heard from some people that on the river Gangā's bank outside Champā in the Anga country there was a sage named Marīchi who had acquired divine sight by virtue of his penances. So I went there, hoping to learn from him where you had gone.

I saw an ascetic sitting dejectedly in the shade of a young mango tree in a hermitage there. He honoured me as a guest and, after I had rested briefly, I asked him: 'Where is the lord Marīchi? I have heard that he is a fund of miraculous wisdom, and I wanted to learn from him the whereabouts of a friend who has gone away for certain reasons.'

The Hermit and the Courtesan

'There used to be such a sage in this hermitage,' the ascetic said with a long and burning sigh. 'He was once approached by Kāma Manjarī, the leading courtesan of Anga's capital. She looked forlorn, with teardrops glistening on her breasts. Her flowing hair spread on the ground as she bowed before him. Her relatives, led by her mother, also arrived at the same time. They were full of concern and had followed her with great haste.

'The sage was compassionate. He comforted them with soothing words, and asked the courtesan about the reason for her distress. Embarrassed, sad, but also proud, she said: "Lord, I am unfit for the pleasures of this world, and only seek merit in the next. You are famous for helping those in trouble. I have come for refuge at your feet."

'Her mother bowed so that the fillet on her grey hair touched the ground. Raising clasped hands, she said: "Lord, let this servant explain to you the faults for which my daughter blames me. My only fault has

been to do my duty. The duties of a courtesan's mother are well known.

“From birth the daughter's limbs must be shaped with massage and other exercises. Her body must be nourished with a measured diet which will increase its energy, strength and lustre, improve the mind, and balance the humours and the elements within.

“From the fifth year her contact with men should be limited, even with the father. But celebrations should be held for her on birthdays, festivals and other auspicious days. Her education should also commence in all the branches of the science of love.

“These include the arts of dancing, singing and playing musical instruments; of theatre, drawing and cooking; and of floral arrangements and making perfumes. They also include the skills of reading and conversing. All of these must be well taught.

“She must know enough of grammar, logic and astronomy to be able to talk about these sciences. But she must have mastery over how to make a living, how to amuse, and how to gamble, both by betting on animals and by gaming with dice. She must also learn from reliable people, with due effort and practice, the arts of coquetry and flirtation.

“During festivals and processions she should be displayed suitably ornamented and surrounded by a large entourage. Through instructors arranged in advance, she should gain success at musical and other performances which take place on special occasions. The fame thus acquired should be heralded abroad. Soothsayers should proclaim her auspicious bodily attributes. Sybarites, wits and go-betweens should spread the word in the community of men of fashion about her beauty, temperament and artistic competence.

“Once she has become the focus of young men's desires, she should be offered for the highest possible fee. She can be given to someone already blinded by passion, or to one who has been seduced by her coquetry. But it should be an independent person of good family and the right age. He should be healthy and good-looking, wealthy and able, generous and simple, competent, cultured and sweet-tempered. To a person who is not independent, but is learned and possessed of the other qualities in high degree, she can be given even for a lower price while making it known that it is much greater. Or she can be married under common law to a minor, and the fee extorted from his guardians.

“If a client has been accepted out of friendship, but the fee cannot be realized, the courtesan's only resort is the ruler or the law-court.

But the daughter should be kept faithful to a client in love with her; his remaining wealth can be extracted in the shape of gifts: those given in the normal course, or on special occasions, or as tokens of love. Money from clients can also be obtained by a variety of other stratagems.

“Miserly clients who will not pay should be denounced and shunned. But the purse-strings of those who are both avaricious and infatuated can be loosened by incitement from the neighbours. As for the impecunious, they should be kept far away by sharp words and public defamation, by humiliation and insult, or by forbidding the daughter to meet them or engaging her with another. On the other hand, considering the need for tranquillity as well as income, she should be introduced again and again to those who can provide protection from trouble, apart from the wealthy and the generous.

“The courtesan should only attract the client; she should not fall in love with him. Even if she falls in love, she should not disobey her mother or grandmother. This is the condition. But this girl has infringed her own duties ordained by the gods. She has spent a whole month at her own expense, in dalliance with an unknown young Brahmin whose only wealth is his beauty. She has rejected and annoyed numerous suitors with plenty of money. And she is ruining her family in the process. When I tried to stop her, saying that nothing good would come of this folly, she became angry and set off to live in the forest. If she remains fixed in this decision, all these people will be left with no alternative but to starve to death here itself.” And she burst into tears.

“Gentle maiden,” the sage said kindly to the courtesan, “living in the forest is very hard. People do it only for attaining salvation or for ensuring a place in heaven. The first is not possible except through the highest wisdom and even then difficult to obtain. The second is easy to achieve for all those who adhere to their ordained family duties. So, turn aside from the impossible and do as your mother says.”

“The courtesan was greatly disturbed. “Lord, if I cannot find refuge at your feet,” she cried, “then the only resort for my suffering is the god of fire.” Pondering this threat, the sage turned to her mother. “Go home for the present,” he told her, “and wait for a few days. By then this delicate girl used to luxury will have had enough of the hard life of the forest. We will also persist in persuading her so that she resumes her normal life.” The woman agreed and went back.

“Thereafter the courtesan put on a pair of simple washed garments and stopped using much make-up. She busied herself with attending

to the plants in the forest, gathering flowers for the divine services, and performing various rituals of worship. She worshipped the god Śiva with fragrant flowers, incense and lighted lamps, dances and music. With these devotions, and with discussion in private about the threefold goals of life and other philosophical subjects, she soon won the saintly hermit's heart.

‘Observing his infatuation, she once said with a smile when they were alone: “People are fools to consider artha and kāma on the same level as dharma.”¹

“Tell me, girl,” responded Marīchi, “how do you hold dharma to be higher than artha and kāma?”

‘Prompted thus, she began to speak slowly and bashfully: “Lord, your knowledge of the threefold goals is certainly much greater than mine. To ask me shows only your kindness to this servant. Very well, then. Listen.

“Without dharma, artha and kāma cannot even begin. Dharma is independent of them, and it alone leads to the bliss of salvation. It is achievable by concentrating the mind; unlike artha and kāma it does not require external aids. Contemplation of the absolute increases dharma, and indulgence in artha and kāma, no matter in what way, cannot obstruct it. Even if obstructed, dharma can be revived with little effort; correcting its faults it soon becomes able again to lead to salvation.

“Look at the gods. Brahmā lusted after the nymph Tilottamā. Siva violated the wives of thousands of hermits. Vishnu dallied in his harem with sixteen thousand wives. Prajāpati inclined even towards his own daughter. Indra committed adultery with Ahalyā. The wind-god went to bed with the wife of Kesarī. The moon-god slept with his guru's wife. The sun-god mounted a mare.

“And look at the divine sages. Brihaspati cohabited with the wife of Utathya. Parāśara ravished the boatman's daughter. His son had sex with the wives of his brothers. Atri did the same with a doe.

“The impermissible conduct of the gods in such cases did not detract from dharma because of the power of their wisdom. Passion cannot soil the mind purified by dharma just as dust cannot besmirch the sky. That is why I believe that artha and kama cannot equal even a hundredth part of dharma.’

‘The sage was aroused. “You minx!” he cried, “you are right! In those who have seen the absolute, dharma cannot be impeded by sensual indulgence. But we have never had anything to do with talk of artha and kāma since birth. We must first know what is their form,

their method and their result.”

“Artha,” she replied, “is about earning, increasing and protecting wealth. Its methods are war and peace, agriculture, cattle-rearing and commerce. Its best fruit is charity to the deserving.

“Kama concerns the special and delightful contact between man and woman when the minds of both are focused on the senses. Its methods are all that is pleasing and beautiful. Its fruit, born of mutual embraces, is a palpable and self-evident pleasure which nothing can surpass. It gives infinite joy, increases self-confidence, and is ever sweet to remember. Highly placed people endure great discomforts and give vast sums, engage in bitter fights and undertake fearful journeys across the sea, just for this pleasure.”

‘It was either her wiles or his folly, or even fate, but on hearing her words the sage abandoned his penances and fell for her completely. She took the fool in a covered carriage through the highway to the city where she installed him in her own house. It was announced that a festival of love would take place on the following day.

‘On the morrow the sage Marīchi was taken to the place of the festival through the city’s prosperous main boulevard. Bathed and perfumed, he wore a fine floral garland and had already begun to assume rakish manners. He could not bear to be parted from the courtesan even for a moment. His interest in his former mode of life had disappeared completely.

‘In the festival garden they came into the presence of the king who was surrounded by a host of young women. “Madam,” the king said with a smile, “please be seated with the reverend lord.” She saluted him and sat down, smiling pertly. Then an elegant lady got up and said with folded hands: “Sire, I have been defeated by Kama Manjañ. I accept to be her servant as from today.”

‘As the lady bowed, there was an uproar of joy and astonishment from the crowd. The delighted king presented Kama Manjari with valuable jewels and other gifts. The leading courtesans and chief citizens congratulated her. Praised by the crowds, she returned home.

“Lord,” she told the sage at home, “it is time to say farewell. You have granted many favours to this servant. Now you should look to your own affairs.”

‘He was, as it were, thunderstruck in the midst of passion. “Dearest,” he said, bewildered, “what is this? Whence this sudden indifference? What has happened to that extraordinary love you had for me?”

‘She replied with a smile: “Lord, you remember the woman who

accepted defeat by me in front of the king today? There had been a little altercation between us. She had ridiculed me, saying that I put on airs as if I could seduce even Mañchi. We had taken a bet on this, with the stake that the loser would become the other's servant. Thanks to you I have won the bet."

"Thus was that fool discarded by her. He went back in a daze, full of remorse. That pitiable wretch, you should know, sir, is myself. But the passion that harlot had inspired in me, she has now been replaced with a great detachment from the world.

'It will not be long,' the hermit added, 'before you are able to achieve your purpose. Till then stay in Champā, Anga's capital city.'

Meanwhile the sun began to set, as if fleeing the darkness released from the hermit's heart. The evening glowed red, lit as it were by his spent passion. The blooming lilies folded their petals, as if introspecting over his tale. In accordance with his wish I joined him in the evening worship after some more discussion, and spent the night there.

The next morning, as sunrise set the mountain peaks on fire, I saluted the sage and set out for the city. On the way I saw a Jain² monk sitting in a deserted spot under some asoka trees in front of a monastery. He was as ugly as could be, apart from looking disorganized, distressed and thoroughly miserable. I noticed that tears were streaking the dirt on his face and breast. Sitting down near him, I asked: 'An ascetic, and weeping? I would like to know the reason for your distress if it is not a secret.'

The Courtesan and the Merchant

'Sir,' said the monk, 'listen if you please. I am the eldest son of Nidhipālita, a rich merchant of Champā. My name is Vasupālita, but I am known as Virūpaka because of my ugliness.

'There was another person here called Sundaraka. He was as good-looking as his name, and accomplished in many arts, but not very well off. Rivalry between us was promoted by scoundrels in the city who make their living out of such things. Contrasting the merits of wealth and personality, they first incited us to mutual insult and abuse at a festival, and then promoted the following arrangement for peace.

"Manhood is rooted neither in wealth nor in personality," they said. "The real man is he for whom even a high-class courtesan longs. Therefore the banner of victory should go to him who is desired by Kama Manjari, the ornament of her tribe."

‘We both accepted this wager and sent our messengers to Kama Manjañ. I turned out to be the object of her passion. Coming up only to me, where both of us were sitting, she signalled her choice with a sidelong glance of her blue lotus eyes which made the other man hang his head in shame.

‘She had found me attractive, and I made her the mistress of my wealth, my house, my servants, my very body and life. She left me only with a loincloth. After I had lost everything, I was driven out of the city, unable to bear the censure of the elders and the people’s ridicule.

‘In this monastery of the Jains, an ascetic instructed me about the path to salvation. I thought that this would be good to follow for one escaping from the whorehouse. In an excess of renunciation I gave up even the loincloth. Then I went through the agony of having all my bodily hair pulled out. Covered with filth and dirt, and suffering acutely from thirst and hunger, I became as restless as a newly captured elephant which can neither stand nor sit, sleep or eat.

‘After these terrible tortures I said to myself: “I am of a twice- born caste.³ Descending to this path of heresy is against my dharma. My forebears followed the path ordained by the Vedas and the other scriptures. What I am unfortunately doing is condemnable, apart from being extremely uncomfortable. I have to listen constantly to the vilification of Vishnu, Śiva, Brahmā and other gods which is bound to send me to hell after I die. It is moreover a fruitless path, full of deceptions, which I have to follow as if it is dharma.” Reflecting thus on my mistakes, I have come to this secluded aśoka grove to shed as many teas as I can.’

Listening to him aroused my sympathy. ‘Bear up with this, sir,’ I said. ‘Stay here for some more time. I will so endeavour that that harlot compensates you with her own wealth. There are ways of doing this.’ With this assurance I took leave.

The Further Tale of Apahāra Varmā

On arrival in the city I learnt from local gossip that it was full of rich and miserly people. Demonstrating the transitoriness of wealth could restore them to a more natural condition. So I decided to follow the precepts of Kārṇīsuta⁴ and enter the profession of crime.

I went into a gaming house and consorted with expert dicers and sharps. I observed all the tricks of the twenty-five types of gambling; the sleights of hand and dice which are exceedingly difficult to detect;

and the arrogant words of insult and defiant expressions of anger which accompany them. I saw too the clever ways of the game-masters; the abundance of tact, force and intimidation with which they appropriate the winnings; their appeasement of the strong, disdain of the weak, and many skilful methods of inducing support.

But I was not content with observing all this amidst the tumult of vulgar voices, nor with seeing the different types of stakes and the generous distribution of profits. I burst out laughing when one of the gamblers made a careless mistake in throwing the dice. His adversary stared at me, eyes ablaze with anger. 'You', he cried, 'are you trying to teach him the game with your laughter? Let this poor fool be. You think that you are clever? I will take you on.' And, with the game-master's permission, he commenced the match.

I won sixteen thousand dinars from that man. Half of this I distributed among the game-master and the other regulars of the house. Keeping the rest, I got up to go amidst words of joy and praise from all. At the insistent request of the game-master I had an elaborate dinner at his house. The person who had been the cause of my foray into gaming became my confidant. His name was Vimardaka, and he became like my second heart.

From Vimardaka's accounts I made an assessment of the city's activities, characteristics and wealth. I equipped myself with a sharp sword, a pickaxe, pliers and a pair of scissors; with a dark lantern, a lampstand and a box of fireflies; and with a measuring tape, a rope with grapple and some sleeping powder. Covered in a blue cloak, dark as Siva's throat, I went to a rich miser's house and dug a tunnel into it. After observing the situation inside through small holes in a lattice window I entered the house as easily as if it was my own, and came out with the strongbox full of money.

The street outside was dark with dense black clouds. But it was lit for a moment with a sudden glow like a flash of lightning. It was the gleam of jewellery on a young woman who had appeared near me in that lonely place. It was as if the city's guardian goddess had materialized, angered by my thieving. 'Who are you, girl?' I asked gently. 'Where are you going?'

Her voice choked with fear as she replied. 'Noble sir,' she said, 'I am the daughter of Kubera Datta, a prominent merchant of this city. At my birth my father promised to give me in marriage to a wealthy boy here named Dhana Mitra. The boy was very generous. After the death of his parents he gave away his wealth to the poor, taking poverty for himself. The people liked him so much that he was honoured with the

title Udāraka, or “the Generous”. But now, when I have grown up and he has asked for my hand, my father thinks that he is too poor. He wishes to give me away instead to another merchant named Arthapati, who is as wealthy as his name.

“The unhappy event is to take place this very morning. Having known this, and having received a prior message from my beloved Dhana Mitra, I have abandoned my family and home. I am now on my way to his house. The road I know since childhood, and the god of love is now my escort. So take these jewels and let me go.’

She took off her jewels and offered them to me. I felt pity and said: ‘Come, good lady, I will take you to the house of your sweetheart.’ We had gone only a few paces when a large group of city guards came upon us, armed with swords and batons, and piercing the darkness with lighted torches.

The girl began to tremble on seeing the guards. ‘Good lady,’ I said to her, ‘do not be afraid. Here is my arm beside my sword. But I have thought of gentler means because of you. I will lie down as if affected by poison. You should tell them: “We have come into the city tonight. My husband has been bitten by a snake at the corner of that assembly hall. If any of you know the incantations, have mercy and revive him, and save my life.”’

As there was no other way, the girl did as I had asked. She stood there somehow, with trembling body, choking voice and eyes raining tears. I lay down exhibiting the symptoms of snakebite. One of the guards prided himself as a physician of poisons. After examining me he tried various incantations, trances, gestures and the like, but had no success. ‘This one is practically gone,’ he said. ‘He has been bitten by death itself. His limbs have turned dark and limp. His gaze is fixed. His body heat has disappeared. There is no point in lamenting, girl. Who can avert what is fated? Tomorrow we will cremate him.’ And he went away with the other guards.

I got up thereafter and took the girl to Udāraka. ‘I am a professional thief,’ I told him. ‘I found her on the street. She is in love with you, and was coming to you all alone. I felt pity for her, and so I have brought her to you. Here are her ornaments.’ I then took out her jewels, whose brilliance dispelled the darkness, and handed them to him.

Udaraka was overjoyed, but also amazed and embarrassed. Taking the jewels, he said: ‘Noble sir, you have given my beloved to me tonight, but you have left me without words. I do not know if I can call this deed of yours marvellous. That may imply that it is

marvellously out of keeping with your own character. To say that it has never been done before belies the uniqueness of your qualities. You are clearly without greed and similar failings of others. If I say that you have set an example of goodness today, I will be ignoring your previous similar deeds. It is certainly not proper to say that magnanimity is now personified in you, as you have always been large-hearted.

‘If I say,’ he continued, ‘that with your good deed you have today purchased this slave, I will be criticizing your intelligence for having bought something so insignificant for such a high price. To offer my own person in exchange for the gift of my beloved is impossible, as without her I would have died; my life therefore is also your gift. In sum, I have come to the conclusion that, from today, this servant is entirely at your disposal.’ Saying this, he fell at my feet.

Raising him, I embraced him and asked: ‘Sir, what do you wish to do now?’

‘I cannot,’ he replied, ‘marry her without her parents’ permission and continue to live here. So I would like to leave this place tonight itself. But who am I to do anything without your instructions?’

‘That maybe so,’ I said, ‘but intelligent men do not proceed on the basis of this or that place. This girl is very delicate. The forest paths are rough and difficult. To quit this place just because of your present problem may show some want of ingenuity and competence. It is better to stay in comfort with her here itself. Come, let us take her home.’

He agreed without further ado. We quickly escorted the girl to her father’s house and, with her as an accomplice, we both conducted such a burglary there that only the clay pots were left after we had finished.

As Dhana Mitra and I were walking away after hiding our booty, a group of city guards arrived upon the scene. An elephant in rut was lying by the roadside, and we mounted it after pulling down the mahout. Bracing my feet in the beast’s halter as I urged it up, it struck the fallen mahout with its tusks, embedding them into his intestines. We then used it to scatter the city guards and to demolish Arthapati’s house. Finally, we took the elephant to a ruined park where we both got off its back by grasping the branches of a tree.

Returning home, we bathed and had just gone to bed when the sun’s orb rose from the sea, glowing like the rubies on the eastern mountain peaks, or the red and gold leaves of the tree of paradise. We got up and, after the morning ablutions and prayers, went wandering

into the city. Our work of the previous night had caused an uproar. We listened to the tumult at the wedding hall. Arthapati comforted Kubera Datta with money and agreed that he would marry the miser's daughter a month later.

Taking Dhana Mitra aside, I advised him: 'Friend, present this fine leather bag to the King of Anga and cultivate him in private. Tell him: "Sire, you know that I, Dhana Mitra, am the only son of Vasu Mitra, who was a multi-millionaire. Having lost my wealth, I am now spurned by the people. Kubera Datta's daughter Kulapalika had grown up pledged to me, but because of my poverty he now wishes to give her in marriage to Arthapati. Deeply grieved, I went to an old forest near the city, determined to commit suicide. As I placed the knife on my throat I was stopped by someone with long matted hair.

"Why this rashness?" he asked. "Poverty," I replied, "which is the sibling of humiliation." "Son, you are a fool," he said with compassion, "there is no greater sin than suicide. Good people help themselves by effort, and not by self-destruction. There are many ways of earning money, but not one of repairing a severed neck to restore life. What will you get from this? I have occult powers. Through them I acquired this precious leather bag which produces millions. I lived for a long time in the land of Kāmarūpa, fulfilling the peoples' needs with the help of this bag. Now age is against me and I have come to live in the earthly paradise which is this land. Take this bag. Apart from me it produces money only for merchants and courtesans, such is its repute. The only condition is that whatever you have obtained unlawfully should be returned to its rightful owner; and all that you have legitimately earned should be given away for the gods and the Brahmins. Except for this, if you keep this bag in a pure place and offer worship to it as to a god, you will find it full of gold every morning. That is the way it works."

"As I saluted him, he gave me this precious leather bag and disappeared into a hole in a rock. I have brought it here as it would not be proper to use it without informing Your Majesty. What should be done is for you to decide."

"The king will certainly say: "Sir, I am pleased. Go and use the bag as you like." You should also request him to see that no one steals it. That too he will definitely accept.

'After coming home, you should then pray before the bag and make charitable donations out of it every day as already explained. Each night it should be replenished out of the money earlier stolen by us, and each morning displayed in public. The greedy Kubera Datta will

then regard Arthapati as no better than chaff and himself beseech you to take his daughter. Arthapati on his part, angry and proud of his wealth, will sue you but we two will have many tricks to reduce him to beggary. Our theft will also remain well concealed in this way.’

Dhana Mitra gladly did as I had told him. On my orders Vimardaka joined Arthapati’s service on the same day, and encouraged his hostility towards Dhana Mitra. The avaricious Kubera Datta became indifferent to Arthapati and sought with many entreaties to marry his daughter to Dhana Mitra. Arthapati opposed this.

During these days it was announced that Raga Manjarī, the younger sister of Kāma Manjarī, would give a dance performance in the town hall. Many respected citizens gathered for the occasion at which I was also present with my friend Dhana Mitra.

When Raga Mānjarī began her performance she danced, as it were, straight into my heart. Kāma gathered strength from all the graces she displayed and, concealed in the lotus forest of her looks, tormented me exceedingly. She bound me in a noose of playful glances, dark as the leaves of the blue lotus. It was as if I had been arrested by the city’s guardian goddess who was angry at my thefts.

Rāga Manjarī went away after the dance, followed by all eyes and hearts, and radiant with success. I do not know whether it was for sport, or out of love, or by coincidence, but, while going, she smiled on some pretext and looked at me more than once with arched eyebrows and sidelong glances which she concealed even from her companions.

I was overcome by an irresistible longing after coming home. My appetite left me and, making the excuse of a headache, I lay listless on a solitary bed. But Dhana Mitra was well versed in the ways of love. Coming to me, he said in confidence: ‘Friend, that courtesan’s daughter is fortunate to have become your heart’s desire. I have carefully noticed her reactions. Kāma will also lay her on the bed of arrows very soon. Your attraction for each other is quite proper. But she has high-minded and noble intentions contrary to the dharma⁵ of courtesans. She has made a vow: “My price is merit, not money. My maidenhood cannot be enjoyed by anyone except after marrying me.” Her sister Kāma Manjarī and mother Mādhava Senā have not succeeded in changing her mind despite repeated remonstrations.

‘Eventually they petitioned the king in tears: “Sire, your servant Raga Manjarī’s talents and disposition are in keeping with her beauty. It was our great hope that she would fulfil our expectations. But that hope has been shattered today. In contravention of her family dharma,

and contemptuous of wealth, she wishes to sell her maidenhood only for merit. She seems determined to emulate the conduct of gentlewomen. It would be good if she were brought back to her real nature at Your Majesty's command."

"The king instructed Rāga Manjarī as he had been requested, but she paid no attention to him. Her sister and mother then went to him, weeping, once again: "If some libertine deceives and seduces this girl without our permission," they have demanded, "he should be executed like a thief." This is the situation. Her family will not permit her to be taken without a payment, and she will not accept any person who makes one. Some way out of this has to be found.'

'What is there to find,' said I. 'I will attract her by merit, and we will secretly satisfy her family with money.' We then made contact with Kāma Manjarī's principal go-between, a Buddhist nun named Dharma Rakshitā. Influencing her with gifts of food and clothing, I struck a bargain through her with the courtesan: 'I will steal Udāraka's precious leather bag, and give it to you in exchange for Rāga Manjarī.' Thus, with her sister's consent, I married Rāga Manjarī who had already become infatuated with me because of my virtues.

Earlier, before the theft of the bag became known, a meeting of prominent citizens had been called on some pretext. In their hearing my secret agent Vimardaka, pretending to be a partisan of Arthapati, hurled threats and insults at Dhana Mitra. The latter remonstrated: 'Sir, why are you abusing me on behalf of someone else? I do not remember having wronged you, even slightly.' But Vimardaka continued to berate him: "This is indeed the insolence of wealth! By bribing her parents you want to lay hands on the wife of another, one whose bride price, moreover, has already been paid. And you say: "How have I wronged you?" It is well known that Vimardaka is an intimate of the merchant Arthapati. I can give even my life for him. I would not stop even at killing a Brahmin. Pride in your precious bag has gone to your head. To set it right will be only a night's work for me.' Speaking in this vein, he was restrained and angrily removed by the prominent citizens.

Dhana Mitra reported this incident to the king, pretending deep concern. He had from the beginning raised the possibility that his bag may get stolen. The king summoned Arthapati and asked him privately: 'Sir, is there anyone called Vimardaka among your people?' 'There is, my lord,' replied the fool, 'he is my intimate friend. Is anything needed from him?' On the king's enquiry, 'Can you call him?' he said, 'Certainly, I can,' and went out, but could not find him

anywhere despite a careful search at his home and the marketplace, the gaming house and the courtesans' quarter. And how indeed could the poor fellow have been found? For, on that very day, Vimardaka had left for Ujjayinī on my orders, to look for you with a signet of introduction taken from me.

In the meantime Dhana Mitra had reported the theft. Out of fear or folly Arthapati protested his innocence. Unable to locate Vimardaka, he thought that he would be associated with any crime committed by the latter. True enough, the angry king had him arrested and put in chains.

Meanwhile, Kāma Manjarī, wishing to make money from the leather bag, embarked on the methods prescribed for this purpose. She secretly visited Virūpaka, who had become a Jain monk, and respectfully returned to him with many entreaties all the money she had swindled him of. He on his part freed himself somehow from the Jain monastic vows and reverted happily to his own dharma on my advice.

Kāma Manjarī made such progress in her plans to earn wealth from the precious leather bag that within a few days only the ovens were left in her establishment. Urged by me, Dhana Mitra told the king in confidence; 'Sire, the cupidity of this courtesan Kāma Manjarī was so excessive that people called her Manjarī the Greedy and she had become an object of public censure. Now she is giving away all her possessions, even the mortars and pestles for pounding the grain, as if she has not a care in the world. I think this is proof that she has my precious leather bag. It is well known that it yields money only to merchants and harlots, and to no one else. That is why I suspect her.'

The king sent immediately for Kāma Mānjarī and her mother. I pretended great concern and told her privately: 'Madam, the public knowledge of your great charity has led to suspicions that you have the precious leather bag. The King of Anga has called you to enquire about it. When you are interrogated repeatedly, it is certain that you will name me as the source from which you obtained it. I will then be put to death by torture. If I die, your sister will not survive. You will lose everything and Dhana Mitra will get back the bag. This crisis will thus lead to a chain of problems. What should we do?'

She and her mother wept as they said: 'It is because of our carelessness that this secret is on the verge of exposure. We may try to hide it twice or thrice or even four times, but when the king insists it is certain that we will have to mention your name in explaining how we received stolen goods. And if we do so our entire family will be

ruined. But Arthapati has also gained notoriety in this matter. That wretch's friendship with us is well known to everyone in this capital of Anga. It will be better to protect ourselves by saying that it was he who gave us this bag.'

After telling me this they went to the palace. Questioned by the king, they tried to cover up at first, saying repeatedly that it was not proper for courtesans to name their benefactors; men did not come to them only with their lawful earnings. But, when they were threatened that their ears and noses would be cut off, both those wicked harlots, implicated poor Arthapati in the charge of theft. The enraged king sentenced him to death.

Dhana Mitra prevented the execution. 'Noble one,' he appealed to the king with clasped hands, 'merchants should not be deprived of life for such crimes. They have been granted this favour since the time of the Mauryas.⁶ If you are displeased with this criminal, you can confiscate all his property and exile him.'

This redounded to Dhana Mitra's credit and fame. The king was also pleased. The money-proud Arthapati, left only with a worn out garment on his body, was exiled in front of all the townspeople. With a portion of his wealth the king, sympathetically urged by Dhana Mitra, compensated the unhappy Kama Manjarī who had lost her all in pursuing the mirage of the precious leather bag.

Dhana Mitra married Kulapālīkā on an auspicious day. Having thus accomplished what I had resolved to do, I began to fill Raga Manjarī's home with gold and jewels.

The affluent misers of that city were so robbed by me that, begging bowls in hand, they became mendicants at the doors of those very paupers whom I had enriched by distributing the stolen wealth. But even the cleverest of men cannot transgress the limits laid down by destiny. Once Rāga Manjarī played the coquette, feigning anger, and I propitiated her with amorous entreaties, making her drink mouthfuls of wine. By tasting one mouthful after another, the wine went to my head.

It is a characteristic of madness and inebriation that they impel one to actions, even wrong ones, to which one is accustomed. I was so drunk that I declared to Rāga Manjarī: 'In just one night I can remove the entire wealth of this city and fill your house with it.' Then, ignoring all the supplications and adjurations of my agitated wife, I rushed out, sword in hand, like an elephant in rut which has suddenly broken its chains. No attendants followed me except for a nursemaid called Śrīgālīka.

In the street I was accosted by the city guards, but I fought them without hesitation. They beat me, thinking that I was a bandit; but instead of getting overly annoyed, I played with them and brought down two or three with the sword which was already slipping from my drunken grasp; then, with eyes red and rolling, I collapsed.

As Śrīgālika screamed and came towards us, my opponents arrested me. This mishap immediately brought me to my senses. The intoxication disappeared and the mind began to work in the same instant. 'Alas,' I thought, 'my folly has brought this disaster upon me. My friendship with Dhana Mitra and my marriage to Rāga Manjarī are well known. Tomorrow they are bound to be implicated in my misdeed and punished. Something must be done so that they can save themselves with my advice and also perhaps rescue me from this calamity.'

Deciding upon a course of action, I told Śrīgālika: 'Get away, you hag. You deserve to die. It was you who brought together that wicked and greedy harlot Rāga Manjarī and that ostensible friend but actual enemy of mine, Dhana Mitra, who is so proud of his precious leather bag. Today I have stolen his bag and all her money and jewellery. Now I can at least die in peace.'

That supremely wily woman at once took the hint. Saluting the city guards before me with clasped hands, she approached them humbly and begged with tears: 'Gentlemen, please wait a little while I find out from him about all our stolen goods.' On their agreeing she came close and, falling at my feet, said: 'Gentle sir, please pardon this servant for speaking out of turn. Dhana Mitra may well have become your enemy by seducing your spouse, but your servant Rāga Manjarī deserves some consideration for having served you so long. Jewellery is the principle wealth of courtesans who have to live off their looks. Please tell me, therefore, where her jewels have been hidden.'

'Very well,' I replied as if moved by pity, 'what do I gain by enmity with her when I am virtually at death's door!' Saying this, I whispered into her ear whatever I needed her to do. She also made out as if she had got what she wanted, and went away forthwith, saying: 'May you live long. May the gods bless you. May His Majesty the King of Aṅga too be pleased with your bravery and have you released. May these good people also be kind to you.' I was then taken to the prison on the orders of the captain of the guards.

On the following day I had a visit from Kāntaka, the chief of the prison. Recently appointed to that office on the death of his father, he was young, impetuous, and not too experienced. He was also vain and

considered himself very privileged and handsome. Threatening me, he said: 'If you do not return Dhana Mitra's precious bag and all the other goods you have stolen from our citizens, you are going to suffer all the eighteen tortures in their entirety before being put to death.'

'Gentle sir,' I told him with a smile, 'I may return all the wealth that I have ever stolen in my life, but I am not going to fulfil Dhana Mitra's hopes of getting back his precious bag. That abductor of Arthapati's wife posed as my friend but turned out to be my enemy. That bag I will not give even if I have to undergo ten thousand tortures. This is my firm resolve.'

My interrogation continued with different questions, threats and soft words every day. Meanwhile my injuries healed with suitable food and drink, and I soon regained my health. One evening, as the day was fading and the sunlight had turned as golden as the god Vishnu's garment, Śrigālika paid me a visit in the prison. She was brightly dressed and looked pleased. Leaving other attendants at a distance, she came close to me.

'Congratulations, noble sir,' she said, 'your excellent plan has succeeded. I went to Dhana Mitra as you had instructed, and told him: 'Noble sir, your friend is in this difficulty and has conveyed the following message for you:

"I am today in prison because of excessive drinking which is always easy in the company of courtesans. You should go to the king today itself and say the following to him without hesitation: "Sire, it was only by Your Majesty's favour that I regained the precious leather bag which had earlier been stolen by Arthapati. Later I got to know the husband of Rāga Manjarī on account of his great skills in the arts, poetry and social intercourse; he is also an expert gambler. Because of our relationship I always treated his wife as one of the family, sending her gifts of ornaments and clothing. That narrow-minded scoundrel suspected me of having designs on her, and has displayed his anger by stealing my precious bag as well as his wife's box of jewellery. Prowling around for further robbery, he has lately been arrested by the city guards. One of Rāga Manjarī's maids followed him in tears now that he is in this trouble. Remembering his earlier love for her mistress, he has told her where he had kept the jewellery box. If he could also be induced to return my leather bag it would be a great favour from Your Majesty."

"Thus petitioned, the king will not deprive me of life but will try instead to persuade me to restore your property. This will be to our benefit."

‘Dhana Mitra was aware of your capabilities,’ Srigalika continued. ‘He boldly did what you had suggested. As for me, I obtained whatever I needed from Rāga Manjarī who was satisfied with the credentials you had given me. By the method you had advised I then cultivated Mangalikā, the governess of the king’s daughter, Ambālikā. With her as the conduit I built up a close friendship between Ambālikā and Rāga Manjarī. Presenting new gifts to the princess every day, and amusing her with clever conversation, I also became her confidante and favourite.

‘One day Kāntaka came in some connection to the courtyard below the women’s inner apartments in the royal palace. I was with Princess Ambālikā in her chamber. Protesting that the flower on her ear had slipped from its place, I pretended to adjust it and dropped it on the ground as if carelessly. Picking it up again, I then threw it with a loud laugh, seemingly to frighten a pair of mating pigeons, but actually so that it struck the chief of the prison.

‘The princess burst into laughter at my actions. Kāntaka looked up, and I made such cunning signs as would convince him that her animation was due to attraction with himself. He stood there smiling with gratification, for Kāma had already raised his bow and transfixed him with a lethal arrow. It was only with some effort that he finally went away.

‘That evening I went to Kāntaka’s house. A girl followed me, carrying a casket sealed with the princess’ signet ring and containing perfumed betel leaves, a pair of silk garments and various ornaments, which I pretended I was taking to Rāga Manjarī. Kāntaka was delighted. He was drowning in the deep sea of desire and found in me, as it were, a ship to take him ashore. I excited the fool even more by describing to him in detail the unbearable pangs of love suffered by the princess. On his request I gave him my own chewed remains of betel, scrapings of body unguents, discarded flowers and a soiled garment, saying that these had been sent by his beloved. He gave similar personal tokens for the princess which I took and later threw away on the quiet.

‘When he was ablaze with passion, I advised him in confidence: “Noble sir, the evidence of your bodily signs is indisputable. A soothsayer in my neighbourhood has stated that the marks on Kāntaka’s body are such that this kingdom is bound to fall into his hands. The princess being in love with you accords with this. She is the king’s only child and, even if he is enraged on learning of your affair with her, he will not put you to death for fear that she will not

survive; on the contrary he will make you his heir- apparent. Thus one objective can lead to another. But why do you not pursue them, my dear? If you do not know how to get into the princess' apartment, well, the distance between the prison wall and the palace garden is only six arms' length. Get some clever thief to make you a tunnel between the two and come into the garden. After that your protection will be our responsibility. Her servants are extremely devoted to her and will never reveal the affair."

"Well said, my good woman," he replied, "there is a thief who is as good as the sons of Sagara⁷ in making tunnels. He will do this work in minutes if I can get him." On my asking: "Why, is he not available? Who is he?" he indicated you, saying, "It is the one who stole Dhana Mitra's precious leather bag."

'I then told him: "If that is so, go and promise him on oath that you will get him released if he does this work for you. Once your purpose is served you can imprison him again, and informally have him eliminated after telling the king that he was interrogated in every way but refused to reveal the whereabouts of the bag because of obstinacy and extreme enmity. This will achieve your end as well as keep your secret protected."

'He was very pleased and has accepted my advice. Now he has sent me here to inveigle you and himself stands outside. Please consider what should be done next.'

'I said little, but you have done a great deal,' I told her happily. 'Bring him here.' Thereafter he swore to release me and I promised to guard his secret. My chains were removed and I bathed, dined and did my toilet. Starting from a constantly dark corner of the prison wall I then dug a tunnel with a pickaxe.

'He swore on oath to release me,' I said to myself, 'but he intends to kill me. Therefore I will incur no sin even if I do away with him.' As I came out of the tunnel and Kantaka stretched out his arm to bind me again, I knocked him down with a kick to his chest and beheaded him with his own cutlass.

Later I asked Śrigālika: 'My good woman, tell me what is the situation inside the women's apartments. This great effort of mine should not go waste. I will steal something there and come back.' I then entered the inner apartments through the section she indicated.

There I saw the princess. She lay asleep on a bed of ivory which was supported by lion-shaped feet and studded with precious stones of great value. Bejewelled lamps flamed nearby and many tired attendants slept all around.

The bed was strewn with flower petals and spread with cushions of cotton white as swans down. The princess slept without a care, one side almost immersed in a pure white counterpane.

Her slim ankles were slightly crossed, with the right heel covering the other foot's instep. The calves touched each other and both thighs and delicate knees were pulled up a little. One beautiful arm rested on the hip like a vine, and the other spread out near the head of the bed with the palm open like a flower. The waist was a bit bent, and the night-dress of Chinese silk clung close to her body. Beneath it, the slender belly was almost still while the hard blossoms of her breasts trembled with each deep breath.

A ruby pendant on a string of beaten gold rested on the lovely curve of her throat. One dainty ear half-concealed an earring underneath it. On the other, that ornament was exposed and its gems cast a ruddy glow on her elaborately tied hair.

Her radiant rosy lips were slightly parted. An ornate canopy overhead reflected a leaf pattern on her smooth cheek. The dark lotus eyes were closed and the pennons of the brows were motionless. Her sandal paste beauty spot had smudged with moisture. Curly tresses encircled the moon of her face. She lay like the lightning which, tired of constant flashing, lies stilled in the lap of the autumn cloud.

I stood there for a moment, looking at her and not knowing what to do. A throbbing desire filled me with wonder. I lost interest in my work of theft, for my heart itself had been stolen. 'If I cannot have this beauty,' I reasoned, 'Kāma will not let me live. But if I approach her without warning it is obvious that she will cry out. That will put an end not only to my hopes but also to my life. So, this is what I must do.'

Taking a wooden tablet glazed with resin from its stand and a paint brush from the jewel box, I drew a portrait of the princess sleeping and myself standing at her feet with hands joined in supplication. Below it I wrote a stanza in the āryā metre:

With folded hands one favour does this slave beseech.
Lie with me, fatigued by love, but never, never thus.

Extracting a fragrant betel leaf with camphor out of a golden container, I then left with its pink juice a pattern of mating birds on the white wall. Finally, I exchanged our rings and, dragging myself from the princess' bedside, made my way back to the prison through the tunnel.

Also in the prison was a prominent citizen named Simha Ghosha

with whom I had become friendly in those days. Explaining to him that the wretched Kāntaka had thus been killed by me and that he may reveal this secret and secure his release, I left the prison with Śrigālika. On reaching the highway I was again apprehended by the guards. 'I can get away fast,' I reflected, 'these people will be unable even to touch me. But this poor woman will get caught. So it is better to do this.' And, approaching them swiftly, I turned around and held out my elbows behind my back, saying: 'Gentlemen, please arrest me if I am a thief. That is your right, but not of this old woman.'

Śrigālika guessed my intention at once. Coming up to the guards with a salutation, she burst into tears and said: 'Good gentlemen, this is my son. He is ill with the wind and has for long been under medical treatment. He looked well enough and seemed to have regained his health in the last few days. I had felt reassured and, removing his straitjacket, I bathed and anointed him today, clad him in a pair of new garments, and fed him a milk pudding. I left him free to sit or rest but tonight he has again been overcome by the wind. Shouting: "I will kill Kantaka and sleep with the princess," he rushed out on the highway. Seeing him in this condition I have followed him at this hour. Please tie him up and let me take him.'

While she was weeping I fled, shouting: 'Old woman, has the wind-god ever been bound? Can these crows catch a hawk like me? Never!' The guards cursed her, saying: 'It is you who are mad to have freed someone who was out of his mind. Now who can catch him?' Still wailing, she ran after me. I went to Rāga Manjarī's house. She had been distraught at my long absence and, after comforting her, I spent the rest of the night there. The next morning I went to meet Udāraka.

Later I met the sage Marīchi. After escaping the perils of the whorehouse he had regained his divine sight by virtue of further penances. From him I learnt that you had been located. Meanwhile Simha Ghosha had pleased the king by reporting the misdeeds of Kantaka, and had been appointed in his place. He enabled me to enter the women's apartments once again through the tunnel in the prison, and I met the princess who had fallen in love with me after hearing about my adventurers from Śrigālika.

It was during this period that King Simha Varmā rejected the proposal for his daughter's hand from Chaṇḍa Varmā, and the latter angrily mounted an attack and besieged the capital. While he was still planning his field arrangements the furious King of Anga broke out through his own fortification and, without waiting for the help which was on its way, engaged his adversary's much larger force.

In the great battle which ensued, Simha Varmā lost his armour and was captured. Chanda Varmā also seized the princess Ambālikā and obstinately took her to his palace to marry her. He even put on the nuptial bracelet in the expectation that the marriage would take place the next morning. I too had tied the auspicious bracelet in Dhana Mitra's house for wedding the same girl. 'Comrade,' I said to him, 'the King of Anga's allies are almost here. Get the city elders to meet them secretly and bring them in. By the time you return, the enemy's head will already be off his neck.'

After Dhana Mitra had agreed and gone, I went to the palace. It was bustling with the preparations for the marriage festivities, and full of people coming in and going out. Concealing a dagger, I went in with the hymn-singers. Chanda Varmā was about to take the princess' hand offered ritually by the priest in front of the sacred fire as the witness. Pulling away his long arm, I struck him in the chest with the dagger. His time had already come. A few others who made as if to move, I also dispatched to hell. The palace was plunged into turmoil. Seeing the wide-eyed and lovely-limbed princess trembling before me, I led her towards an inner chamber to give myself the pleasure of her embrace. At that very moment I was favoured by the deep sound of your voice, thundering like a new raincloud.

After hearing Apahāra Varmā's tale, His Majesty Rājavāhana said with a smile: 'How wonderful! You have surpassed even Karṇīsuta in desperate deeds.' Looking at Upahāra Varmā, he added: 'Speak on. Now it is your turn.' Saluting him, the latter then began to speak with a smile.

The Tale of Upahāra Varmā

In the course of my wanderings I arrived one day in the land of Videha. Before entering its capital, Mithilā, I stopped at a small monastery outside to rest for a while. An old nun gave me water for washing my feet as I sat on the terrace before the gate, but she wept incessantly from the moment she laid eyes on me.

‘What is this, mother,’ I asked, ‘why are you crying?’ She replied tenderly: ‘May you live long, my child. This Mithilā once had a king called Prahāra Varmā. He was a close friend of Rājahamsa, the King of Magadha. The friendship between their wives, Vasumatī and Priyamvadā, was unequalled: it was like the wives of Bala and Śāmbala¹ of old. When Vasumatī had the joy of being with child for the first time, her dear friend Priyamvada went with her husband to Pushpapurī to see her. At that very time war broke out between the Kings of Magadha and Mālava.

‘In that war the King of Magadha came to such a pass that not even a trace of him remained. Prahāra Varmā was spared his life by the King of Mālava, and started back for his own land. On the way he learnt that his kingdom had been seized by Vikata Varmā and the other sons of his elder brother Samhāra Varmā. Wishing to obtain some troops from his sister’s son, the King of Suhma,² Prahāra Varmā then took a path through the forests. There he was waylaid and robbed by the hunters of the jungle.

‘The king’s younger son was in my arms. Frightened by the shower of arrows from the savages, I fled with him into the forest, all by myself. There I was attacked by a tiger. Wounded by its claws, as I fell down the boy slipped from my hands and hid inside the carcass of a cow. The tiger attempted to drag away the carcass, but an arrow released from a spring bow killed it instantly. The children of the savages carried off the little boy.³

‘I had fainted. A shepherd took me to his own cottage and kindly

treated my injuries. On recovering I wanted to return to my master but was perplexed in the absence of any help. At that stage my daughter turned up with a youth. She wept copiously as she recounted her story.

‘After the attack on our party, the prince in her care had been taken away by the chief of the hunters. A savage had treated her wounds and, after her recovery, had wanted to marry her. Dismayed at the thought of such a base connection, she had rejected him harshly; and, unable to bear this, he had tried to behead her in the lonely forest. The youth had come upon them by chance, and killed that villain. Later he had married her. On enquiry it transpired that he too was a servant of the King of Mithila. He had been following the royal party but had been delayed for some reason. With him I went to my master and gave to him and to the lady Priyamvada the bitter news of their sons.

‘The king could not tolerate the endless opposition of his elder brother’s sons, and fought against them long and hard. Unfortunately, he was captured and the queen was also arrested. As for my ill-fated self, unable to give up this wretched life even in my old age, I reluctantly entered the monastic order. With equal reluctance my daughter joined the service of Vikata Varmā’s queen Kalpa Sundarī, for the sake of a wretched livelihood. Had those two princes grown up without all these mishaps they would have been of your age by this time. With them here, the king’s relations would never have dared to take such liberties.’ And, deeply distressed, she burst into tears again.

I too shed tears on hearing the nun’s words. ‘Do not worry at this, mother,’ I told her in confidence. ‘In that situation had you not begged a certain sage to take care of the boy, and he had brought him up? It is a long story, and why talk of it now? But I am that boy. I can put an end to Vikata Varmā if I am able somehow to get close to him. But he has many younger brothers and the people of the town and the countryside are with them. On the other hand no one here knows me or who I am. Even my parents are unaware of me, what to say of the others. So I will need to find ways for achieving my purpose.’

The old woman embraced me repeatedly and sniffed my head. Milk welled up in her breasts.⁴ ‘Live long, my child,’ she said in tears, ‘may all go well with you. Destiny smiles on us today. Videha is restored to Prahāra Varmā today itself, now that you with your long and strong arms are there to take us across this boundless ocean of sorrows. What a great and good fortune this is for the lady Priyamvadā.’ Overjoyed, she then provided for my bath and dinner.

I spent the night in a corner of that monastery on a bed of straw. ‘This problem cannot be solved without some stratagem,’ I thought to myself, ‘and women are the breeding place for stratagems. So I must learn what goes on in the inner apartments from this old nurse and spread my net through her.’ While I was thinking thus, night rolled back, shaken by the sun’s swift stallions as they rose from the sea; and the sun itself appeared, still cool from its sojourn in the ocean’s womb.

After I had got up and completed the morning rites, I asked the nun: ‘Mother, do you know anything about what goes on in that villain Vikata Varma’s seraglio?’ I had not finished speaking when another woman appeared. Seeing her, the nurse said in a voice choked with tears of happiness: ‘Daughter Pushkarikā, here is our master’s son. I had abandoned him heartlessly in the forest, but he has returned.’

The newcomer was also overcome with extreme joy. Having wept loud and long, when she quietened at last, her mother put her to giving the news of the royal inner apartments. She said: ‘Prince, even though Vikata Varmā has many women, he loves only one. She is Kalpa Sundarī, the daughter of Kalinda Varmā, the King of Kāmarūpa.⁵ She surpasses even the celestial nymphs in beauty and skill, and she rules her husband though she does not care for him.’

‘Go to her with perfumes and garlands from me,’ I told Pushkarikā. ‘Engender in her a dislike for her husband by playing upon their dissimilarities and his defects. Make her feel regretful by telling her about Vāsavadattā⁶ and others who had worthy husbands. Find out with suitable efforts about the king’s secret love-life with his other women, and incite her fury by revealing it to her.’

‘You too must attend upon this queen,’ I told the nurse. ‘Give up your other work. You should inform me every day about what transpires in the inner apartments. And your daughter should get close to Kalpa Sundarī like her own shadow, so that we may accomplish the sweet results of our scheme as I have already explained.’

Both women carried out their appointed tasks. After some days the mother reported to me: ‘Child, she has been convinced to believe that her lot is as sad as that of a jasmine creeper trained around the bitter neem⁷ tree. What should be done next?’

I then drew a portrait of myself and said: ‘Take this to her. After seeing it she is bound to ask if there is any man who looks like this. You should say: “If there is, then what?” And let me know whatever she says in reply.’

‘Very well,’ she said, and went to the palace. On her return she told me in private: ‘The portrait was shown to that best of women. She was

wonderstruck. "The world is enriched by this," she said with respect, "even Kāma, the god of love, is not possessed of such bodily glory. This portrait is truly marvellous. I do not know of anyone here who could do such work. Who has made this picture?"

"I told her with a smile: "Your Majesty's words are befitting. It cannot be supposed that even the lord Kama is as beautiful. But this sea-girt earth is vast. A form even such as this is possible somewhere if it is destined. However, if a young man with such an appearance, with skills, temperament, knowledge and wisdom to match, and a high pedigree to boot, were to be nearby, what could he expect to get?"

"Mother," she replied, "what can I say? Body, heart, life? All this would be too little and too unworthy. So he will get nothing. But if it can be done without deceit, I would be gratified if you can so arrange that I may see him."

"To firm up this matter I spoke to her once more: "There is a prince who is travelling here incognito. He chanced to see you at the Spring Festival when you were taking the air in the city park with your companions, like an embodied Rati. He became an exclusive target for Kāma's arrows, and has been after me ever since. You both have rare good looks and other great qualities befitting each other. Prompted by them, I have been serving you with floral garlands, unguents and other cosmetics made by him. To see the depth of your interest he has now sent his own portrait, which he has himself prepared. Should there be a definite understanding, then there is nothing impossible for this man with his extraordinary energy, prowess and intelligence. I can show him to you today itself. You have only to give me a hint."

'After some thought, she said: "Mother, there is nothing secret from you anymore, so I will tell you this. There was great amity between my father and King Prahāra Varmā. My mother Mānavatī and the lady Priyamvadā were dear friends. Even before either of them had children, they had sworn that any daughter born to one would be married to any son born to the other. But such was fate that, thinking that Priyamvadā's children had perished, my father gave me away to Vikata Varmā who was also a suitor. He is hard-hearted and drunk with power, a braggart and a liar. He is moreover uncomely, unskilled in the practices of love, and uninterested in the arts like poetry and drama. He fights his elders and patronizes the unworthy. This husband does not please me at all, specially these days. Disregarding even my close confidante Pushkarikā, with his own hands he plucked flowers from the champaka⁸ creeper which I had nurtured like a child in this garden, and decorated with them that dancing girl of his,

Ramayantikā, who does not know her place and dares to be jealous of me. He dallied with her in our pleasure-mountain cave on the same jewelled couch from which I had got up. He is a worthless man bent on humiliating me. How can I care for him?

“The pains I have suffered in this world have overshadowed my fears of the next,” the queen added. “The pain of being forced to live with an obnoxious person is intolerable for women whose hearts are like quivers full of Kama’s arrows. So bring me together with that man today, in the bower of spring vines in the garden. My heart is already taken up with him after what you have told me. Here is a hoard of money. With it I will instal him in the other’s place, and lead my life attending to him alone.”

‘Naturally I agreed with her before returning,’ concluded the nun. ‘Now it is for the prince to decide.’

I then learnt from her in detail the location of the inner apartments, the placement of the guards and the layout of the royal pleasure park. Meanwhile, the sun turned red, as if bloodied by its fall from the mountain peaks of eventide. Descending into the western ocean, it went out like a piece of burning coal dipped into water. And, like the swirling smoke, darkness spread in the sky. The moon, that eminent luminary who coveted the spouse of his guru,⁹ arose as if to guide me to my rendezvous with another’s wife.

I lay on a suitable bed. The moon smiled, as if delighted to see me first, before it beheld the bright lotus face of Kalpa Sundarī. It exalted the power of the lord Kāma, who appeared ready to conquer the world. ‘My purpose is almost accomplished,’ I thought, ‘but sleeping with another’s wife will hurt dharma. However, the compilers of the scriptures permit this if both artha and kāma are also attained at the same time.¹⁰ I am committing this transgression to free my parents from jail. That should neutralize any sin, and may also reward me with some fraction of dharma. Even so, who knows what His Majesty Rājavāhana and my friends will say on hearing of this.’ Worrying thus, I went to sleep.

In a dream I then saw the elephant-headed lord Ganeśa. ‘Gentle Upahāra Varmā,’ he said, ‘do not harbour dark thoughts. You are an element of myself. The excellent Kalpa Sundarī is none other than the river goddess Gangā, who properly lives in Śiva’s hair. Annoyed by my churning her waters, she once cursed me to be born as a mortal. I cursed her back: “May you too don the human garb, and be enjoyed by more than one person on earth, as you are in heaven.” She then requested: “Having lived with one person, may I live thereafter

serving only you for the rest of my human life.” Therefore your purpose is worthy and should not cause any apprehension.’

After waking up, I spent that day happily, recapitulating the signals of love for the forthcoming tryst. On the following day Kāma did nothing else but shower his shafts on me. Eventually that lake of light, the sun, dried up and the mud of darkness spread everywhere. I put on dark clothes, collected necessary equipment and, girding my loins, went forth sword in hand. Following the landmarks indicated by the nun, I soon stood by the deep waters of the moat which surrounded the palace. Pushkarika had earlier kept a bamboo pole for me at her mother’s door. Laying it down I crossed the moat, and leaning it against the palace wall I climbed up. From there I descended to the ground on the other side by the brick staircase leading from the top of the palace gate.

Inside the palace grounds, I crossed a row of mimosa trees, and followed for some time a path lined with frangipani, listening to the mournful notes of water birds far to the north. Turning in that direction, I then went the distance of a bowshot along another pathway full of trumpet flowers which skirted the middle part of the great palace wall. Turning again eastwards, I traversed a sandy track flanked by asoka and fig trees on either side. It went a little north and then southwards once more where it entered an alley formed of mango trees. In its centre was a platform of precious stones under a dense bower of spring vines through whose narrow opening the glimmer of a lamp could be seen.

I entered the bower from one end. The wall of the chamber within it was lined with rows of blooming yellow amaranth. The floor was scattered with fresh flower buds and shoots of the red asoka. I opened a door, roseate with new blossoms. Inside was a couch well spread with flowers, with a fan of ivory and a carafe of scented water. Cups fashioned from lily leaves contained various material for lovemaking. I sat for a moment, resting and inhaling all the fragrances. Then I heard the sound of soft footsteps. Immediately I came out of the trysting chamber and stood concealed behind a red asoka tree.

She came to the chamber slowly. Her ardour had yet to cool, and she was greatly agitated not to see me there. In a faltering tone, but a voice as sweet as that of the royal swan, she cried: ‘It is obvious that I have been deceived. How will I live? What is this, O my heart? You decide to do what should not be done, and when that proves impossible, you get so convulsed? O lord Kama, how have I offended you that you burn me thus and not incinerate me once for all?’ ‘My

belle,' I said, coming forward and turning up the lamplight, 'you have indeed offended Kama deeply. Your beauty has shamed the goddess Rati who is his life. The arch of his long-bow is put to shame by your brows; his bow string by the gleam of your dark, curly hair; and his arsenal of missiles by the shower of your sidelong glances. The glow of his saffron banner is worsted by your radiant lips; his great friend the southern breeze by your fragrant breath; the nightingale's call by your sweet voice; and his flower pennant by your slender arms. Your breasts put to shame the bowls filled for his victory march, your hips his battle chariot, and your thighs the precious columns of his palace gate. His pleasure-pool cannot match the zone of your navel. The ornamental blossom on his ear is outdone by the tints of your feet. So it is only proper that Kāma should torment you. If he is at fault it is because he also torments to excess an innocent like me. Therefore grant me your favour, beautiful one. I have been stung by the serpent of love, and you must revive me with the life-giving antidote of your glances.' Saying this, I embraced her.

Her soft eyes widened with pleasure as we made love. After she was satisfied, I noticed that they had reddened, and the gaze had turned sidelong. A faint line of perspiration moistened her brow, and she moaned incessantly with a sweet sound. Her limbs, now bearing the red marks left by my love bites and scratches, were inert. I also relaxed my mental and bodily concentration to match her condition. We separated at that moment, experiencing for sometime the afterglow of the act of love and a deep mutual confidence as if we had long known each other. I then gave vent to a long, hot sigh and, looking at her a little timidly and shyly stretching my arms, gave her a hug not too firm and a kiss less than emphatic.

Her eyes filled with tears as she said: 'Lord, if you are going, take me too, or consider me dead. Otherwise this servant's life is worthless,' and she raised clasped hands to her head.

'You simpleton,' I replied, 'which man alive does not want a woman who loves him? If your intention to favour me is firm, then, without any further thought, do as I tell you.

'Show my portrait to the king in private,' I told her, 'and ask him: "Is not this face the ideal of manly beauty?" "It certainly is," he will definitely say. Then, tell him further: "There is a woman ascetic who has acquired many skills during her travels in various lands. She is like a mother to me. She showed this portrait to me and said: "There is a particular incantation by using which you can obtain such an appearance. For that you must fast on a holy day, and go alone at

night to a deserted place which has already been used by the priests for the fire sacrifice. There you must offer one hundred pieces each of sandal and aloe wood, together with a fistful of camphor and many garments of silk into the sacred fire with this incantation. Then, ring a bell to call your husband. If he comes with his eyes closed, and embraces Your Ladyship after telling you all his secrets, this form will be transferred to him and you will resume your appearance as before. But if this interests you and your beloved husband, it must be ensured that there is no deviation from the ritual.’ So, if such a body pleases you, take a decision after consulting your friends, ministers and brothers, as well as the people of the city and the villages, and get ready for this enterprise.” He will certainly agree to this.

‘Let an animal then be sacrificed with the rites of the Atharva¹¹ at the crossroads of this pleasure garden. After the priests leave the sacrificial fire and its smoke is being put out, I will come and stand within this very arbour. When dusk deepens you must whisper into Vikata Varmā’s ear, as if in jest: “You are an ungrateful rogue. Because of me you will obtain an appearance which feasts every eye. But with it you will delight only my rivals. I am not going to raise a devil just to spite myself.” Then come alone and tell me whatever he says in reply. After that I will deal with him. But you must get Pushkarikā to erase my footprints from the garden.’

‘Very well,’ she said, receiving my words as if they were a holy writ. She then went back to the inner apartments with much reluctance, for it seemed that her carnal desire was not yet satisfied. I too departed as I had entered, and returned to my residence.

This excellent woman carried out the plan, and that idiot followed her advice. The extraordinary story spread in the city and the countryside: ‘It is said that King Vikata Varmā is going to obtain a divine body by the power of the queen’s incantations. It is not a hoax nor a question of madness, but indeed an auspicious bit of news. One hears that his own chief queen will perform the rite in the garden of his inner apartments. It has also been supported after due deliberation by his ministers who equal Brihaspati, the guru of the gods, in intelligence. If it comes to pass, there could be nothing more amazing than this. The power of gems, herbs and incantations is unimaginable.’

The holy moonless night arrived as this talk was spreading. Dusk fell and darkness deepened. Smoke as dark as Siva’s throat began to billow out from the garden of the inner apartments. The odour of sacrificial oblations, milk, clarified butter and yoghurt, sesame and white mustard seeds, flesh, fat and blood, filled the air and spread in

all directions. I entered as the rising smoke suddenly subsided. The queen too, her gait as majestic as the elephant's, arrived at the garden house. Embracing me, she said with a smile: 'You rascal, your work is done. That animal is finished.'

'To allure him I said as you had told me: "Liar, I am not going to get you your good looks. If you become so handsome, even the celestial nymphs will be after you, what to say of mortal women. You are fickle and uncaring like a bee, and go wherever you please.'" He fell at my feet and said: "O lady of the beautiful legs, forgive my misdeeds. From now on I will not even think of other women. Please start the ritual quickly."

'So, I have come to you in this bridal dress,' the queen told me further. 'This bride has already been given to you once by father Kama, with the fire of passion as the witness. Now, calling to witness the sacrificial flames, my heart gives her to you once again.' Then, pressing one foot with the other and standing on tiptoe, she entwined her arms like creepers round my neck and, fluttering her enormous eyes, lifted her lotus face voluptuously to mine and kissed me again and again.

I told her; 'Stay within these amarnath bushes while I go out and complete properly whatever has to be done.' I then went to the place of the sacrificial fire and rang the bell which hung from an asoka branch. It sounded like the angel of death calling him, and the king came as he had been told. Meanwhile I had begun to put the oblations of sandal and aloe wood into the fire. Noticing that he appeared somewhat suspicious and surprised, I said to him as he sat down: 'As the god of fire is the witness, tell me truly once more. If you will dally with your other wives in this form, then I am not going to transfer it to you.' He was immediately convinced that I was no masquerade but actually the queen, and started to swear an oath. With a smile I said once again: 'What is the need to swear? No woman can compare with me in any case. If you want to lie with celestial nymphs, do so by all means. But tell me what are your secrets. Your present appearance will be transformed as soon as you do that.'

'My father's younger brother, Prahāra Varmā, is under arrest,' he said. 'It has been decided with my ministers that his food will be poisoned and it will be made known that he has died of indigestion. I intend to give my younger brother, Viśāla Varmā, an army to attack the Pundra country. The city elder Pāñchālīka and the merchant Paritrāta have secretly advised me that an invaluable diamond can be obtained from the Greek, Khanati, at a very low price. My confidant,

the village chief Śatahali, is a leading person in the countryside, and would like to incite people to kill another village leader, Anantasīra, who is a wicked liar and very proud. He has accepted that this may be done by some officers appointed by me. These are the recent secrets.'

I then struck him down with a dagger, saying: 'Your time is up. May you get what you deserve.' Cutting him into pieces I consigned him there and then into the sacrificial fire which had already been fuelled with much clarified butter. Soon he was reduced to ashes.

My beloved had meanwhile shown some natural feminine agitation. Reassuring her, I led her by the hand to her palace, where I summoned all the denizens of the inner apartments with her permission, and pressed them immediately to her service. We spent some time in diversion amidst this bevy of surprised beauties. After they had retired I took my lady with the lovely legs to bed where, pleasing her with embraces and caresses of the arms and the thighs, I passed the night as if in a moment.

The next morning I met the ministers after my bath and prayers. 'Gentlemen,' I said to them, 'my nature has changed with my appearance. The father whom I had thought of slaying by putting poison in his food, should be released and asked to take back this kingdom. We should treat him with the honour due to a father. There is no sin greater than parricide.'

I then summoned Viśāla Varmā and told him: 'Brother, the Pundras are facing a drought at present. Driven by misery, ignorance and desperation they can attack our prosperous state. You should campaign against them when their sowing or their harvest fails. The present is not the right time.'

I spoke also to the two city elders: 'In the interest of protecting dharma a thing of great value like that diamond should not be procured for me at a low price. Purchase it at an appropriate cost.' Summoning the village chief Śatahali, I further said: 'It had been planned to destroy Anantasīra as he was a supporter of Prahāra Varmā. But there is no reason for doing so, now that my father has been restored. You also should not harbour any ill will against him.'

All these people were surprised to hear their secrets, and were convinced that I was Vikāṭa Varmā. As they praised me and the queen, and lauded the power of her incantations, my parents were released from prison and restored to their kingdom. I had them informed in secret by my old nurse about my work, which transported them to the limits of joy as I served them. With their permission I was installed as the heir-apparent.

Although I had achieved success, I still felt the pain of separation from Your Majesty. From the letter of my father's friend Siṃha Varmā I learnt about Chanda Varmā's attack on Champā. Considering it my duty, both to protect a friend and destroy an enemy, I set out with a swift and sizeable force. Now I have had the great pleasure of seeing Your Majesty in person.

Having heard this account, Rājavāhana said to his queen with a smile: 'See, even deceitful conduct, including adultery, has earned much dharma and artha by virtue of freeing elders from the pains of confinement; finding means for the destruction of wicked enemies; and being the cause of gaining a kingdom. Can a deed done with intelligence fail to give glory?' Turning then to Artha Pala with a long and tender look, he commanded: 'Sir, tell us now about your deeds.'

The Tale of Artha Pāla

Sire, engaged in the same tasks as these friends, I too wandered over this earth which is bounded by the sea with its garland of waves, and came at last to the city of Vārāṇasi, also known as Kasi.¹ I bathed there in the crystal clear waters of Maṇikarṇika and bowed before the great god Śiva, the destroyer of the demon Andhaka. As I was circumambulating the temple, I saw a man of gigantic proportions girding on his belt with immense arms like beams of iron. His eyes were red and swollen with tears.

‘This is a hardened man,’ I told myself, ‘yet his dull eyes reveal a certain distress. From his ways he seems reckless and uncaring, even for his own life; he will certainly get into some trouble and also create problems for his dear ones. Let me ask if I can help him in any way.’ Going up to him, I then said: ‘Sir, your actions indicate that you are a man of courage. I would like to know the cause of your sorrow if it is not a secret.’

‘What is the harm,’ he said, looking at me with respect. Sitting down with me under an oleander bush, he began his story: ‘Listen, Your Honour, my name is Pūrṇa Bhadra, and I go where I please. My father was a village headman in the eastern country. He brought me up with great care, but due to some quirk of fate I became a professional thief.

‘Once, while I was burgling the house of a rich merchant in this city of Kāśī, I was apprehended together with the stolen goods, and sentenced to death on the orders of Kāma Pāla, the chief minister. He stood watching from the balcony on top of the palace gate as a rutting killer elephant named Mrityu Vijaya was set upon me.

‘The elephant charged, its trunk coiled and the peals of its great bell adding to the roar of the assembled crowd. As it lunged at me with its tusks, I struck them fiercely with the wooden stock in which my arms had been secured, and rebuked it in a bold voice. The beast retreated,

as if frightened. Its angry mahout urged it forward once more with threatening shouts, kicks and the goad. But I rebuked and struck it with redoubled fury, and it turned tail and fled. “You wretched elephant! Are you dead?” the incensed mahout cried as I rushed forward reviling him; and repeatedly stabbing at the animal’s eye with his sharp goad, he somehow turned it round once again. “Take away this insect of an elephant,” I then shouted, “and bring a better one with whom I may sport for a moment before going wherever I have to go.” But the animal, on hearing my angry roars, disobeyed its driver’s cruel commands and ran away once more.

‘Thereafter, I was summoned by the minister. “Sir,” he said, “this killer elephant, Mrityu Vijaya, was like death itself, yet you were able to prevail over it. Can you not give up your present deplorable way of life and lead a respectable existence like the rest of us?” I told him that I would do as he instructed and he began to treat me like a friend.’

The Tale of Kāma Pāla

‘After I had gained the minister’s confidence,’ continued Pūrṇa Bhadra, ‘on my asking him once, when we were alone, he told me his life story.

‘In the city of Kusumapura,’ he said, ‘there used to be a minister of King Ripunjaya,² who was named Dharma Pāla. He was famous for his wisdom and his knowledge of the scriptures. His son Sumitra was the equal of his father in intellectual qualities. I am Sumitra’s younger half-brother. I used to spend my time in houses of pleasure but this was forbidden by my brother who believed in discipline. My bad habits were, however, uncontrollable, and I ran away. After many wanderings I chanced to arrive in Vārāṇasi.

‘I had come to this garden to pray to the god Śiva. The daughter of King Chāṇḍa Siṃha of Kāśī, Kāntimatī, was playing a ball game with her companions here. I fell in love with her and somehow we managed to meet. We would sport secretly in the women’s quarters and she came to be with child by me. Eventually she was delivered of a son, but he was stillborn, and the attendants abandoned the body on the recreation hill for fear of our affair coming to light. From the hill it was taken to a nearby cemetery by a woman of the Sahara tribe. While she was returning at night, the guards caught her on the high road and, threatened by them with dire punishments, she revealed our

secret more or less.

‘I was sleeping without a care in the cavern of the recreation hill³ when I was pointed out by the Śāhara woman. On the king’s orders I was bound there and then with ropes and taken the same night to the cemetery for execution. But as the Chāṇḍāla⁴ executioner raised his sword to slay me, my bonds snapped by a stroke of luck and, seizing the weapon from the outcaste, I cut him down as well as some others, and fled from there.

‘Wandering in the forest without refuge, I came upon a maiden whose appearance was that of a celestial being. She was carrying the equipment of a nurse-maid, and her eyes were full of tears. She saluted me, raising clasped hands like flower buds to adorn her wavy-haired head, and we sat down in the cool shade of a great wild banyan tree. “Who are you, girl,” I asked her kindly, “from where have you come, and for what reason do you so honour a person in my condition?”

‘She replied in a voice as sweet as honey: “Noble sir, my name is Tārāvalī and I am the daughter of Mani Bhadra, a lord of the Yakshas. I was returning from the southern mountains after paying my respects to Lopāmudrā, the spouse of the sage Agastya, when I saw a little boy weeping in the great cemetery of Vārānasi. Moved by affection, I picked him up and took him to my parents. My father took him to the court of the lord of Alkā,⁵ the king of the Yakshas. The latter summoned me, and asked: ‘Maiden, what are your feelings towards this infant?’ On my saying that I felt for him as if he were my own child, the Yaksha king observed: ‘This poor girl speaks the truth,’ and narrated at length the story of the boy’s origins.

“What I learnt was this. You indeed are Śaunaka as well as Śūdraka, who are no different from Kāma Pāla. Bandhumati, Vinayavati and Kāntimati are the same person. Vedimati, Āryadāsī and Soma Devī are also one. Hansāvalī, Śūrasenā and Sulochanā are identical, and so are Nandinī, Rangapatākā and Indrasenā. The cowherd’s girl, whom you took to wife in front of the sacred fire when you were Saunaka, was later Āryadāsī and is Tārāvalī today. This child you had sired from me when you were Śūdraka and I was Āryadāsī. He was lovingly nourished by Vinayavati, and had now been born to Kāntimati.⁶

“Destiny had thus brought to me this boy who had escaped time and again from the jaws of death. Commanded by the king of the Yakshas I have given him to Vasumatī, the royal spouse of Rājahamsa who is praying in the forest, to serve her son Rājavāhana who will be

the future King of Kings. Now, with the permission of my elders, I have come to serve you, who have also been saved by fate from the peril of death.”

“Tears of joy filled my eyes as I listened to her and, with many comforting words, I embraced my love of previous lives again and again. Then, in a great mansion materialized by her magic powers, I enjoyed, day and night, the pleasures which are difficult to obtain on this earth. After two or three days spent thus I said to that paragon: “Beloved, I would like to experience the pleasure of revenge by settling scores with my mortal enemy, Chanda Simha.” “Come, my dear,” she replied with a smile, “I will take you to see Kāntimatī.” And she took me to the king’s bed chamber at midnight.’

‘I awakened the king with a sword-stick which lay by his head. “Sir, I am your son-in-law,” I told him, “the one who possessed your daughter without your permission. I have now come to right that wrong by attending upon you.”

‘The king was terrified. With a deep obeisance to me, he said: “Sir, I am the one who is at fault. You condescended to take my daughter. Yet, like an ill-starred fool, I crossed all limits and ordered your execution. Therefore, let alone Kāntimatī, this kingdom and my life itself are at your disposal from this moment.”

‘And, having assembled his subjects, he formally married his daughter to me on the following day. Meanwhile Tārāvali had recounted to Kāntimatī the news of her son and the story of the previous births of Soma Devī, Sulochanā and Indrasenā. Since then I have been wielding the power of heir apparent while holding the office of minister, and enjoying myself with these charming women.’

‘Kāma Pāla was the best friend of the people,’ Pūrṇa Bhadra said further. ‘He looked after even a creature like me. His wife’s elder brother, Chanda Ghosha, had earlier died young due to excessive debauchery. When his father-in-law, King Chanda Simha, passed away with the wasting sickness, that good man had the prince Siṃha Ghosha, who had not yet turned fifteen, anointed, and brought him up with all care.

‘Siṃha Ghosha has now acquired the impetuosity of youth and become intimate with some wicked and malicious ministers. They have tutored him as follows: “That libertine Kāma Pāla got hold of your sister by force, and was ready to strike the sleeping king, your father, with his sword. Suddenly awakened and frightened, the king appeased him by giving his daughter to him. He murdered Your

Majesty's elder brother Chanḍa Ghosha with poison, and has let you live till now only in order to gain the people's confidence, and in the belief that you are young and powerless. You should endeavour to send this ingrate to hell before he destroys Your Majesty also." But even though Siṃha Ghosha's mind has thus been poisoned, he is unable to cause any harm to Kāma Pāla as he fears the Yakshi.

"The other day Queen Sulakṣhaṇā noticed that Kāntimatī did not look as well as before, and asked her affectionately: "Madame, I should not be deceived with untruths. Tell me truly, why has the look on your lotus face changed in these last few days?" She replied: "Lady, do you remember my ever having spoken an untruth up to this day? My friend and co-wife Tārāvati has a somewhat difficult disposition. Our husband happened to address her by my name when they were alone, and she was consumed by jealousy. Disregarding our endearments and entreaties she has gone away from the country. Our husband is in agony. This is why I am depressed."

'Sulakshana told all this in private to her husband, King Simha Ghosha. Relieved of all fear, he has today had Kāma Pāla seized and confined by his appointed men. Kāma Pāla's limbs had turned pale after separation from his beloved. His eyes were full of tears held back by self-control. Hot sighs and harsh words manifested his grief as he somehow conducted his official work in the palace. We hear that his crimes will be proclaimed publicly, and his eyes will be put out in such a way that it will lead to his death. That is why I have come here, to weep alone as much as I can. I am girding on my waist sash as I prefer to give up this life before that good man is slain.'

The Further Tale of Artha Pāla

I too was moved to tears on hearing of my father's plight. 'Gentle sir,' I said to Pūrṇa Bhadra, 'why should I hide this from you? I am that very son of Kāma Pāla who was handed over by the daughter of the Yaksha to queen Vasumatī to serve King Rājavāhana. I will be able to destroy even a thousand armed warriors and rescue my father. But if the weapon of only one finds its mark on his body in the fighting, all my efforts will turn to ashes.'

While I was still speaking, a large snake put out its head from a hole in the wall. I caught it with the aid of incantations and herbs, and told Pūrṇa Bhadra: 'Sir, we have what we need. Unnoticed in the crowd, I will make out as if this snake has fallen by chance on my father, and get him bitten by it. Then I will so control the spread of its venom that

the people abandon him, thinking that he is dead. You should meanwhile stop worrying and inform my mother: “Your son, who had been handed over by the Yakshi to Queen Vasumatī in the forest, has come back. He has learnt from me about his father’s situation, and will use his head to proceed in such and such way. You should fearlessly send a message to the king: ‘It is the dharma⁷ of rulers that the wicked should be punished, irrespective of whether they are kinsmen or not. And the dharma of women is to follow the husband irrespective of his being good or wicked. So, I will mount the funeral pyre with him. This final rite appropriate for women should be permitted.’ Thus requested, the king will certainly agree. You should then bring the body to your own house and lay it out on a mat of straw in a secluded place sequestered by curtains. You should also stay there, dressed as if to follow him in death. I will be waiting in the outer room and you should let me in. I will then resuscitate my father and carry out the further course of action which he prefers.”

Pūrṇa Bhadrā was more than happy to agree and went off quickly. As for myself, I climbed atop a tamarind tree at the place of proclamation, and concealed myself in the dense foliage on its big branches. Others also secured high vantage points and all kind of gossip commenced.

My father was brought and placed near me. His arms had been bound behind his back like those of a thief, and a large and noisy crowd followed him. The Chāṇḍālā executioner announced three times: ‘This minister, Kāma Pāla, coveted the kingdom and secretly murdered his sovereign Chāṇḍa Simha and the crown-prince Chāṇḍa Ghosha with poisoned food. Thereafter he also wished to harm His Majesty Simha Ghosha who had attained the fullness of youth. He called the ministers Śivanāga, Sthūna and Angāravarsha, whom he trusted, to a private place and conspired with them to assassinate the king; but they were loyal to their master, and exposed this plot. The judge has decreed that it is proper that this power-hungry Brahmin be consigned to perpetual darkness. In accordance with this sentence he is being taken to be blinded. Should anyone else act against the law, he too will be punished suitably by His Majesty.’

As a tumult arose in the crowd on hearing these announcements, I dropped the snake with its gleaming head on my father. Jumping down, as if frightened, I then merged into the mob after ensuring my father’s life by swiftly staunching the venom of the angry reptile which had bitten him. He fell down on the ground as if dead, and I shouted: ‘Truly, fate itself punishes the king’s enemy. The king wished

to remove only his eyes, but fate has separated him from life itself.’ Some supported and others condemned me. Meanwhile the snake also bit the Chāṇḍāla and fled as frightened people scattered out of its way.

My mother had already been informed of the situation by Pūrṇa Bhadra. Showing little agitation, even in the face of such adversity, she came on foot calmly, followed by her household and attendants. Sitting down with my father’s head in her lap, she sent a message to the king; ‘Destiny alone knows if this my husband did you ill or not. Thinking about it is of no consequence to me. But it will disgrace your house if I do not follow him who took my hand in marriage. It is therefore proper that you permit me to mount the funeral pyre with my lord.’

The king was delighted to get this message. ‘The rituals befitting our family should be carried out,’ he instructed. ‘Let my sister’s husband receive the last rites with all ceremony and pomp.’ When the Chandalā died, all the healers’ efforts having been negated by me, the king was convinced that Kāma Pāla had also been bitten to death; and to exhibit his own magnanimity he permitted the body to be taken to our house.

My father was brought home and stretched out on a straw mat in a secluded place. My mother put on the funeral vestment and prayed to the household gods once more. Consoling her companions tenderly, and persuading the servants to cease their lamentations, she entered the room where my father lay alone. I had already been admitted there by Pūrṇa Bhadra, and she saw her husband relieved of the venom by my ministrations. With tears of joy she fell at his feet, and the milk rose in her breasts as she embraced me again and again. ‘My son,’ she cried in a voice faltering with tears and happiness, ‘why are you so good to me, this merciless sinner who abandoned you at the very moment of birth? Or, is it that your father here being innocent, it was only proper to retrieve him from the jaws of death? Tārāvalī was cruel indeed that, even after learning the facts from Kubera, she did not give you to me but to Queen Vasumatī instead. Perhaps she did right. Compared to someone of Vasumatī’s good fortune, a person of little merit like me could not deserve to enjoy the nectar of your sweet childish talk. Come, embrace me!’ And, repeatedly sniffing my head, embracing and taking me into her arms, anointing me with tears while cursing Tārāvalī, her body trembling like a reed, she became in a moment, a totally different person.

My father was transported from decline to acclivity as if from hell to

heaven. Hearing all that had happened in detail from Pūrṇa Bhadra, he considered himself even more fortunate than the god Indra. I told my delighted and wonder-struck parents only little concerning myself. ‘Please command what we should do now,’ I asked. My father said: ‘Child, this house of ours is surrounded by a great wall and has an arsenal of innumerable weapons. Its security is impregnable. The chieftains indebted to me are very many. A majority of the populace does not wish to see me persecuted, and many thousands of fine soldiers with their friends and families are in any case with me. So, staying here itself for some days, we will promote discontent inside and externally. Encouraging and allying ourselves with those who are disgruntled, and inciting his natural and hereditary enemies, we will extirpate this insolent Simha Ghosha.’ I endorsed my father’s view, saying, ‘Let it be so. What is the harm?’

While we waited after making these plans, the king reproached himself on learning about us, and attempted many hostile moves; but we countered them daily. During this time, on being informed by Pūrṇa Bhadra about the location of the king’s bedchamber, I began to make a tunnel towards it with a special instrument commencing from a corner of the wall of our house.

The tunnel opened into a place which was like heaven on earth, with many young maidens who were much agitated on seeing me. One girl trembled like a sandalwood vine in the southern breeze. She was like some crescent moon whose glow dispels the darkness of the nether world; like the earth-goddess personified, or the divine spouse of Siva, born to conquer the demons; like the consort of Kama, the god of love, come to the infernal region, or the glory of royalty hidden in the abyss to escape the gaze of wicked kings. She had the bright aura of an image of burnished gold.

An old woman with hair as white as the flowering reeds in bloom came forward from this feminine group and, falling at my feet, said timidly in a voice full of fear: ‘Please grant safe conduct to these helpless women. Are you a prince of the gods who wishes to enter the world below to fight the demons? Tell us who you are and why you have come here.’

‘Fair ladies,’ I replied, ‘please do not be afraid. I am Artha Pāla, begotten by the excellent Brahmin Kāma Pāla from the lady Kāntimatī. I was proceeding for certain purposes from my house to the royal palace by this tunnel when I saw you here. Tell me, who are you, and why do you live here?’

Folding her hands, the old woman said: ‘Prince, it is our good

fortune to see your handsome self with these eyes. Listen. Your grandfather Chaṇḍa Siṃha had two children from Līlāvati: Chaṇḍa Ghosha and Kāntimatī. Chaṇḍa Ghosha, the crown- prince, was excessively addicted to women, and died of consumption as a consequence. His wife, the lady Āchāravati, was pregnant at the time, and gave birth to this maiden who was named Maṇikarṇikā. But Āchāravati also followed her husband, losing her life in childbirth. King Chaṇḍa Siṃha then summoned me and told me in private: “Riddhimatī, this little girl has all the auspicious attributes. I would like to give her in marriage to Prince Darpasāra of Mālava after she has grown up properly. But, since the episode of Kāntimatī, I am afraid to have girls stay in public places. She should, as such, be brought up by you with a sufficient number of attendants in the great subterranean mansion with many pavilions and concert halls, constructed under the artificial hill for use in emergencies and enemy attacks. It is stocked with provision which will last even for a hundred years.” Saying this, he opened a stone covering of the width of a hand from the two-finger thick wall of his bedroom and sent us all inside through the doorway thus formed. We have been living here for the last twelve years and this child has now become a young woman. But the king no longer remembers us. She may well have been intended by her grandfather for Darpasāra, but she was won in a gambling match by your mother Kāntimatī even while she was in the womb, and promised by her own mother as your wife. So it is for the prince to consider what should be done.’

‘I will return today itself, after completing my work in the palace,’ I told her. ‘Then I will do whatever is appropriate for you all.’ And, when it was midnight, I went out through the same passage, now shown to me by lamplight. Opening the stone cover, I entered the chamber where Simha Ghosha was sleeping free of care. Seizing him alive and trembling, I dragged him, like a snake drawn by an eagle, through the opening in the wall to the abode of the women. From there I took him to our house, and showed him in private to my parents, his feet secured in iron fetters, his face pale and downcast, and his eyes red with tears.

I told my parents the story of the subterranean chamber. After seeing that malefactor and confining him in prison, they joyfully gave to me his girl’s hand in marriage with due ceremonies. The leaderless kingdom also passed into our hands. My mother wished to free Simha Ghosha, but this was not done for fear of the people’s anger.

We were in this situation when we came here on learning that King

Simha Varmā of Anga, a devoted ally of Your Majesty, was being attacked by enemies. I have been favoured by the dust of your lotus feet. Let the wicked Simha Ghosha now seek repentance by saluting your feet which can absolve him of all his sins.

Artha Pāla bowed to King Rājavāhana with folded hands. ‘You have done a great feat,’ said the king, ‘it is a wonderful application of intelligence. Let your parent-in-law be released and see me.’ Turning then to Pramati with a glad smile, he said: ‘Now, tell us your tale.’

The Tale of Pramati

Sire, wandering in different directions in search of Your Majesty, I found myself one evening under a tree by the side of the Vindhya mountain which touches the clouds.

The setting sun adorned the western sky like a new red leaf bud in a damsel's hair, as I took the ritual sip of water from a pond and performed the evening worship. Meanwhile the highs and the lows of the terrain had begun to look the same in the darkness. Unable to go any further, I prepared a bed of leaves on the ground and got ready to lie down. Lifting my clasped hands to the head, I prayed: 'May the divinity who lives in this tree protect me while I sleep all alone in this great forest, terrible with roaming hordes of predatory beasts, whose deep caves are full of the night's murky currents, dark as Śiva's throat.' Cushioning my head on my left arm, I then lay down to sleep.

Within moments thereafter, my limbs felt the bliss of a rare touch, my senses filled with delight, and my inner being with contentment. My skin bristled and a shudder passed through my right arm.¹ 'What is this?' I wondered as I slowly opened my eyes. Above me was a canopy of white cloth, pure as moonlight. Looking to my left, I noticed a group of women sleeping, free of care, on colourful beddings by the wall of a palace. On my right lay a maiden on a counterpane as white as the foam of ambrosia.

The covering had slipped from her breasts. She seemed like the earth goddess on the radiant tusk of the Primeval Boat,² the silken garment of the milky ocean waters slipping down from her shoulders, as she lies swooning with fear. The fragrance which wafted from her lotus mouth played upon the tender buds of her red lips and rekindled, as it were, the embers to which Kāma had been reduced by the fire of Śiva's gaze.³ Her lovely face was still like the lotus which sleeps as the bee slumbers within it, and her blue lily eyes were closed. She lay like a jewelled vine from the celestial tree in the

garden of paradise, which Indra's elephant pulls out in his pride and leaves behind.

'Where has that great forest gone,' I said to myself, 'and from whence has come this palace, lofty as the lance upon the tower of the war-god, which touches the roof of the sky? Where also is that pallet of leaves spread on the forest floor? And where has this bed of silk and swansdown come from, bright as a flood of moonlight? Who are these beauties, sleeping so free of care, like unconscious apsarās fallen from their litter strung on moonbeams? And she who sleeps on this bed with its silk coverlets pure as the autumn moon, this maiden who looks like the lotus-bearing goddess Lakshmi, who is she?

'Well,' I concluded, 'she is certainly not a goddess. She is asleep, like a lily gently caressed by the moon's rays. There is a line of perspiration on her temple, like the nectar drops which flow and spot the ripe, pale mango fruit when it is plucked from the stem. The cosmetic pomade on her breasts has been discoloured by the irresistible flush of youth. Both her garments are dishevelled by use.⁴ So, she is only human.

'Fortunately the purity of her maidenhood is unsullied. Her tender limbs are held close together. Her body is very smooth but pale. Her face lacks the blush which comes from knowing the sting of love, though the lips have the glow of coral. The cheeks are not too full nor flushed, and are as firm as the petals of the budding frangipani. The nipples of the breasts have not been enlarged by uncaring caresses. She sleeps sweetly, free of any care or fear of being struck by Kāma's arrows. Besides, the attachment I feel for her does not transgress the bounds of propriety.

'If I embrace her in keeping with my attachment, it is clear that she will wake up with a scream. But, without embracing her, I will not be able to sleep. So, let whatever is destined come to pass. I will see that which is fated.' Pondering thus whether to touch or not to touch, and pierced by fear and desire, I lay there, pretending to be asleep.

She began, slowly and lazily, to stretch her left side which trembled and bristled as if with some luxurious feeling. Her eyes opened a little, their corners reddened with interrupted sleep, the pupils languid, the tips of the lashes fluttering. Fear and surprise, a wanton confusion, a thrill of pleasure and doubt, and other indescribable emotions interspersed with bashfulness exhibited themselves under the marvellous influence of Kama. Her voice was ready to call out to her attendants, but her heart was helpless under that influence. Controlling herself as fear and effort covered her limbs with

perspiration and gooseflesh, and looking at me with longing through sweetly half-closed eyes, she raised the upper part of her body, but continued timidly to lie on the same bed.

Even though my mind had been possessed by desire, I somehow fell asleep. Soon my body felt the discomfort of an unpleasant contact and I woke up. Once more I was in the same vast forest on the same bed of leaves under the very same tree. Night gave way to the dawn. It came to my mind: ‘Was it a dream or an illusion? Was it the magic of some god or demon? Whatever may happen, I will not leave this bed on the ground without learning the reality. I will spend the rest of my life on vigil here for the deity of this place.’ With this firm resolve I remained where I was.

A woman appeared after some time. Her thin and wasted body was like a string of blue lotuses scorched by the sun. Her dry, coppery lips were pallid with the heat of her breath which seemed to exhale, as it were, the brown-black flames of a fire of separation. Her eyes were red as if only blood remained in them after a ceaseless flow of tears. Her upper garment was in tatters. Her hair was tied in a single plait, indicating confusion in family ties and conduct. She wore a dark blue robe and moved like a symbol of wifely devotion. Some god had favoured her with a not too pale colouring even though she was very thin.

I saluted her and, holding me with her vine-like arms trembling with joy, she embraced me as if I were a son. Nuzzling my head, the milk of maternal emotion welling in her breasts, she said in a voice choked with tears and love: ‘My child, if Vasumatī, the consort of the King of Magadha ever told you that the daughter of Māṇi Bhadra placed the boy Artha Pāla in her care and disappeared after recounting to her the tale of her husband, son and friends as told by the King of the Yakshas, then know that I am that one, your mother. With a mind full of anger I had abandoned the feet of your father Kāma Pāla,⁵ the son of Dharma Pāla and younger brother to Sumantra. I suffered deep remorse and a demon cursed me in a dream: “You harridan, I will possess you for one year and make you feel the pain of exile.” I woke up on hearing this, and the next year was indeed thousand years long.

‘I set forth last night, saying to myself that, freed from the curse, I would go to my husband after attending the festival of Śiva, the god of gods, at Śrāvastī,⁶ and meeting my kinsfolk gathered there from many different places. You were sleeping here after having prayed to the deity of this place for protection. I did not then recognize you

properly as I was still afflicted by the curse. But, as it would not have been proper to leave in this great forest full of unending perils someone who had sought protection, I took you along while you were still asleep.

‘As I approached the god’s temple, I thought again: “How will I go to the festival with this youth?” Then I chanced to see Navamālikā, the daughter of the lord of Śrāvastī, the appropriately named King Dharma Vardhana, sleeping on a great soft bed in the women’s apartments on the seventh floor which is so pleasant in the summer. “Luckily she is asleep,” I said to myself, “the attendants are also in deep slumber. This young Brahmin can lie here for a short while till I finish my business and return.” And leaving you to sleep there, I went to the temple.

‘I saw the festival in all its splendour and had the pleasure of meeting my kin. Having saluted the Lord of the Three Worlds fearfully, for I remembered my mistakes, I bowed with a heart full of devotion before his consort, the lady Ambikā. That goddess, the daughter of the mountain, told me with a smile: “Do not be afraid, good woman. The duration of your curse is over. You will now be by your husband’s side.” Thus favoured, I regained all my powers immediately. Seeing you on my return, I recognized you for who you were: “Oh, this is Pramati, the lifelong friend of my child Artha Pāla. He is like a son to me, and I have sinned by treating him with indifference out of ignorance. Besides, he is attached to this girl. She also desires him. Both of them are pretending to be asleep, not revealing their feelings, one to the other, because of fear or shame. I have to go. Even though this girl has been touched by Kāma, she has kept her secret and not told her companions or servants about it. So, I will take this youth. He will be able to attain his objective suitably when he gets another opportunity.” Using my powers to put you into a deep sleep, I then brought you back to your bed of leaves. This is what happened. Now I am going back to your father’s feet.’ As I saluted her, she embraced me again and again, kissing me on both cheeks, and went away, overwhelmed with love.

I was in Kāma’s power, and made my way to Śrāvastī. In a big market by the roadside the merchants were holding a cockfight accompanied by tremendous noise. I stood there, smiling at the sight. An old and sharp looking Brahmin seated nearby asked me the reason for my quiet smiles. ‘Without proper consideration,’ I said, ‘how have people set a Balākā breed cock of the western variety against an eastern variety bird of the breed Narikela which is superior in size and

strength?' He too understood these things. 'Sit quietly,' he responded, 'what is the point of learned discussion with these fools.' Taking out betel leaf with camphor from his wallet, he gave some to me, and stood for a while telling me all kinds of stories.

The two enraged birds clashed with each other amidst full-throated roars by the group whose favourite mounted a counterattack. The cock of the western variety was defeated. The smart Brahmin, overjoyed with the victory of the fowl of his preference, became friendly with me despite the difference in our ages. He took me to his home the same day and arranged for my bath and dinner. On the following day he accompanied me on my way to Śrāvastī and bade me a friendly farewell, saying: 'Remember me when your work is done.'

I arrived in Śrāvastī tired with the travel, and lay down to rest in a bower of vines in the garden outside the city. The sound of ankle bells awakened me. Getting up, I saw a young woman approaching, the anklets on her feet tinkling at each step. She stood before me for a moment, looking in turn with surprise, conviction and joy, at me and at a picture board in her hands, on which was drawn a figure in my likeness. Seeing that portrait too, I realized that her scrutinizing gaze was not accidental. 'This beautiful part of this auspicious garden is meant for public use,' I said to her, 'why do you take the trouble of standing for so long? Do take a seat.'

'I am honoured,' she said with a smile, sitting down. We talked for a while about the surroundings till she was engrossed in the conversation. 'You are a guest here,' she said, 'your limbs appear fatigued from travel. If you do not mind, please do me the honour of resting at my house today.' I replied: 'Young lady, I do not mind at all, it will be very good,' and followed her to her house where I was offered a bath and a meal fit for a king. Later, when I was sitting alone at ease, she asked: 'Sir, did you see anything particularly marvellous in the course of your travels in various places?'

'This is extremely hopeful,' I said to myself. 'She is certainly the one companion of the princess whom I had noticed in all that group of her attendants. In the portrait also, there is that palace floor with the white canopy above, and the vast bed, white as a mass of autumn clouds. The figure reposing on it with eyes closed in sleep is indeed myself. It is certain therefore that the princess too has been taken to that limit by Kāma where, tormented and maddened by his unbearable fever, she has cleverly drawn this portrait to give an appropriate answer to her companions' insistent questions about the cause of her condition. This query shows some doubt about the

resemblance, which I should clear by recounting my experience.'

Making up my mind, I said: 'Lady, give me the picture board.' She placed it in my hands and, taking it, I drew on it on one side the portrait of my beloved, agitated by increasing ardour, but pretending to be asleep. 'I saw a young woman such as this,' I said, 'lying by the side of such a man, when I was sleeping in the forest. Was it a dream?'

She was delighted and questioned me in detail, whereupon I told her the whole story. She told me in turn about the changed condition of her friend, the princess, caused on my account. Hearing this, I said: 'If your friend is inclined to grant me her favour then let a few days pass. I will return after arranging some way for gaining entrance without any alarms to the women's apartments.' Explaining this to her as best as I could, I went straightaway to the village and met the clever old man.

The oldster was taken aback. After enabling me to rest and arranging for my bath and meal, he asked me confidentially: 'Sir, how is it that you have come back so soon?'

'It is appropriate indeed for you to ask me, sir,' I replied. 'Listen. There is the city of Śrāvastī. Its ruler is King Dharma Vardhana, a second Yudhishtira.⁷ He has a daughter, a girl named Navamālikā, whose delicacy puts to shame the vine similarly called.⁸ She is as the breath of love, and outshines the goddess Lakshmi. I saw her accidentally, and she showered my vitals with glances like a volley of Kāma's arrows. There is no physician capable of extracting those barbs except you who are another Dhanvantari.⁹ That is why I have come back.

'Please consider some method,' I added. 'I will change into a woman's garb and pretend to be your daughter. Taking me, you should approach the king when he is dispensing justice, and say: "This is my only daughter. Her mother died at the time of her birth. I have been both father and mother in bringing her up. A certain Brahmin boy is presently away in the city of Ujjayinī in Avanti to acquire the education which will be her bride-price. He is from a family with which we can have connubial relations, and I have agreed to give her in marriage to him, and to no one else. But his return is delayed, and she has meanwhile grown up. After bringing him back and entrusting her to his care, I intend to take monastic vows. But it is difficult to look after a daughter who is no longer a child, specially one without a mother. That is why I have come to Your Majesty who stands in the place of father and mother to his subjects. You are the refuge of all who seek protection, and also a model of conduct since the time of the

very first king. If you, Sire, will include this old, learned but helpless Brahmin wanderer among those you favour, then this girl can stay under your protection with an untarnished reputation till I come back with her husband to be.”

“Thus petitioned, the king will certainly agree and have me lodged near his own daughter. In the coming month of Phālguna the women of the royal household will take part in the pilgrimage festival when the constellation Uttara Phālgunī is rising. You, sir, should position yourself, with a pair of white garments in hand, in the temple of the god Kārtikeya. It is located in the middle of a cane grove to the east of the place of pilgrimage, at a distance where a lowing cow can still be heard. I will meanwhile have participated with the princess in the festival. Splashing in the river Gangā while the girls are busy with their play, I will dive inside and swim under water till I emerge near you. Then I will discard the feminine garb, put on the clothes you have brought, and go with you, pretending now to be your prospective son-in-law.

“The princess will search for me here and there. Not finding me, she will insist: “I will not eat without her,” and stay weeping in the inner apartments. This will cause a great tumult, with her servants wailing, her companions weeping, the citizens lamenting, and the king with his ministers not knowing what to do.

“You should then go to the capital and, placing me in front, tell the king: “Sire, here is my son-in-law. He is fit for Your Majesty’s service. He has studied the four Vedas and grasped their six limbs.¹⁰ He is well-versed in logic, and proficient in the application of the sixty-four arts and sciences. Specially knowledgeable in the organization of elephants, chariots and cavalry, he is incomparable in the use of the bow and missiles, and in fighting with the mace. He is also competent in history and the epics, writes poetry, plays and novels, and knows the secrets of the *Artha Śāstra*.¹¹ As for virtues, he is free of envy, loyal to friends, soft-spoken, cooperative, unassuming, and able to remember what he hears. I have not found the slightest fault in him, nor any virtue absent. For a mere Brahmin like me such a relation is hard to come by. So, if Your Majesty agrees, I would like to give my daughter away to him, and myself pass into the last stage of life appropriate to old age.

“The king will be exceedingly embarrassed. His face drained of colour, he will commence, together with his ministers, to placate you with litanies about the world’s transience and suchlike. You should pay no attention to these; instead, weep loud and long till your throat

is choked with tears; then collect wood and light a fire in front of the palace gate, and start to mount the funeral pyre. The king will then fall at your feet with his ministers and, propitiating you with much wealth, will give his daughter to me in marriage. Satisfied with my competence, he will also place the entire burden of governance in my hands. This is the method. It can be put into practice if you agree.'

That old Brahmin, Pāñchāla Śarmā, was the foremost of sharp tricksters, and an old hand in the practice of fraud. He organized everything expertly, even better than what he had been told to do. My objective was attained in good time. I enjoyed the love of Navamālikā just as the bee does the flowers of the vine which bears her name.

I came to Champā with all my army with the twofold expectation of providing assistance to King Simha Varmā, and meeting friends at the place appointed. Fortune has given me the pleasure of seeing Your Majesty also.

Having heard Pramati's tale, the prince said with a smile on his face: 'Prowess with great pleasure, effort with great tenderness, this is the preferred way of the wise.' Looking at Mitra Gupta, he added: 'Sir, you may make your entry now.'

The Tale of Mitra Gupta

I travelled, Sire, for the same reasons as the other friends. In the park outside the city of Damalīpta¹ in the Suhma country I observed a great crowd gathered for some festival. I saw there a young man in a bower of spring creepers, looking depressed and diverting himself by playing the lute. ‘Sir, what is this festival called?’ I asked him. ‘What is the occasion? And why is it that, ignoring the festival, you sit by yourself with the lute for company and look so depressed?’

‘Gentle sir,’ he replied, ‘Tungadhanvā, the ruler of Suhma, was childless. He prayed for two progeny before the goddess Vindhyavāsini² who, having given up her attachment to living in the Vindhyas, now dwells in the temple here. It is said that while the king was keeping vigil she told him in a dream: “One son and one daughter will be born to you. The son will come under the tutelage of the daughter’s husband. For obtaining a worthy match the daughter should worship me every month by performing the dance of the ball when the constellation Krittikā appears in the sky. She should do this starting from her seventh year until she is wedded, and the festival should be known as the Ball Festival. But she should be given in marriage only to someone whom she chooses.

‘Shortly thereafter the king’s beloved consort Medinī gave birth to a son. A daughter was also born. That girl, Kandukāvati, will come today to worship the moon-crested goddess with the dance of the ball. Her friend Chandrasenā, who is her nurse’s daughter, is my sweetheart. But she has been forcibly kept back from coming today by the prince Bhīmadhanvā. That is why I am depressed. Kāma’s sharp arrows torment my heart, and I sit alone trying to console myself with the deep notes of the lute.’

At that moment there was a tinkle of ankle bells, and a young woman arrived. The youth’s face lit up on seeing her, and he arose and they embraced each other warmly before sitting down in the

bower. 'This is she, my very breath,' he said, 'separation from whom was burning me like fire. The prince is bent on taking my life. Like death he holds me with an icy hand. I can do him no harm as he is the king's son. Let her see me well before I give up this life, unable to resist.'

The woman said in tears: 'Lord, don't do anything desperate on my account. You are the son of the distinguished merchant Artha Dāsa. Your elders named you Kośa Dāsa but, because of your deep attachment for me, your enemies made you known as Veśa Dāsa or the harlot's slave. If you die, my remaining alive will only confirm the saying that harlots are heartless. So take me today itself to the place of your choosing.' The man then asked me: 'Sir, among the countries you have visited, which is the one where there is prosperity, abundance and a majority of good people?' I replied with a smile: 'This sea-girt earth, sir, is vast. There is no dearth of attractive communities in various places. But I will try to find some means for both of you to live happily here itself. If not, I will then show you a way out.'

Meanwhile there was a sound of jewelled anklets. 'That is the princess Kandukāvati,' the woman said with a start, 'she is almost here. She comes to worship the goddess Vindhyavāsini with the dance of the ball. Watching her at this Ball Festival is not forbidden, and your eyes can have their fill. Come and see. I must go and join her.' Saying this she departed, and we followed her.

When I saw her for the first time, the rosy-lipped princess was standing on the great gem-encrusted stage. She conquered my heart in that very moment. Neither I nor anyone I knew had seen her before. Wonderstruck, I thought: 'Is she the goddess Lakshmi? That is not possible. The goddess bears a lotus flower in hand, but this maiden's hand is itself a veritable lotus. She has, moreover; not been enjoyed already, like Lakshmi, by the Primeval Man and by ancient kings; for her maidenhood is fresh and faultless.'

As I wondered at her immaculate beauty, the princess bowed demurely to the goddess, the fingertips of her upturned hand brushing the ground, and her dark curly locks quivering. Then she took a ball marked with the bright red eye-like symbols of Kama, and dropped it to the floor with a languid motion. As it bounced back gently, she struck it with her palm, the thumb curled and the delicate fingers extended, and tossed it up like a nosegay of flowers with the back of her hand. Flashing eyes fixed on the ball, she caught it halfway as it fell and then dropped it again. With sharp and light volleys for a swift or a slow rhythm, she displayed the style called chūrnapada or

alternating steps. The slow ball was hurled high with relentless strokes, and slowed again contrariwise. When it came softly to the side, she bounced it in turn with either hand, making it fly like a bird. When it fell after rising high, she hit it to demonstrate the style *gītamārga* or the ten steps, making the ball hurtle back and forth in every direction.

Dancing thus with many lovely movements, and receiving loud applause and praise at each step from the enthralled spectators, she reached a point of particular grace at the very moment when she turned towards me as I stood leaning on the shoulder of *Kośa Dāsa*, thrilled and wide eyed. Then *Kāma* descended on her for the first time. Her gaze was filled with sidelong glances under arching brows. Her lips trembled with an intake of breath like new leaf buds as light played upon them. With a motion as if to brush away from her face a bee attracted by its lotus fragrance, she followed the whirling ball quickly into an enclosure made of flowers. It was as if seeing me had filled her with coyness. Enacting the style *panchabindu* or five spots, she shuddered as if afraid that all the arrows of *Kāma* would strike her at the same time. And she danced the *gomūtrikā* or zigzag style with an intense emotion, all aquiver like a flash of lightning.

The princess' feet kept time with the rhythmic tinkling of her jewels. Her lips glowed with the dancer's stazy smile. Her hair slipped to her shoulders and were gathered back again. The gems and the chains twinkled in her girdle, and the bright silk on her comely hips rippled as she raised and arched them. The ball gleamed, stroked by her sinuous arms as she swung them, now curved now extended.

At last her arms drooped. The hair spread over her shoulders in a wave. The golden leaves of the earrings slipped from their place, and were quickly adjusted without interrupting the movements of the dance. The ball still circled in and out, between repeated strokes of her hands and feet, and her slender waist seemed to vanish in constant bending and rising which also disarrayed her necklace of pearls. But she now used the leaf on her ear as a fan to dry the perspiration which was beginning to stain the decorative pattern on her temples. And one bud-like hand held the garment which was slipping from her breast.

The princess sat down. Blinking she got up again and performed the most complex and beautiful steps, making one ball appear as several on the ground and in the air. Finally, after a group dance with *Chandrasenā* and her other dear friends, she bowed again to the goddess and, giving me a sidelong look like the blue lily arrow of *Kāma*, departed with her companions to the women's quarters. My

smitten heart followed in her train of attendants. She too on some pretext turned towards me more than once, as if to see if her heart, which had reached out to me, was going back with her or not.

Deeply agitated by Kāma, I went home where Kośa Dāsa had arranged an excellent bath and meal for me. Chandrasena arrived in the evening and, saluting me in private, lovingly sat arm in arm with her mate. 'My beauty,' said the pleased Kośa Dāsa, 'I hope I may continue to be the recipient of such favours as long as I live.' I remarked with a smile: 'Friend, why only hope? There is a certain ointment. If she presents herself before the prince after applying it to her eyes, he will see only a she-monkey and lose interest in her and give her up.' She laughed and told me: 'Sir, it is extremely kind of you to want to turn this obedient servant from a human being into a she-monkey in this lifetime itself. But let that be. Our wish is as good as fulfilled even otherwise. There is no doubt that at today's Ball Festival the princess succumbed to your beauty which puts even the love-god's to shame. It seems that Kāma is angry, for he is tormenting her very much. This is clear to me and I will tell my mother, who will tell her mother, the queen. She will inform the king who, understanding the situation, will marry his daughter to you. The prince will then become your ward. This is what the gods have ordained. Once the kingdom is under your control, Bhimadhanva will be unable to disobey you and hold me by force. So, please be patient for a few days.' Advising me thus she embraced her lover and went away. I passed the night as best as I could, in long discussions with Kosa Dasa about what she had said.

On the following day, after the appropriate duties of the morning, I went to the park where I had seen my beloved. The prince had also come there. He spent some time with me, speaking pleasantly without any airs. Later he took me to the palace and entertained me with arrangements for bathing, dining and resting, the same as his own. As I lay dreaming about my sweetheart and the pleasure of her embraces, I was overpowered by many strong and stout-armed men and bound in iron fetters. Rudely awakened, I was addressed by the prince: 'You miscreant! What that wretched Chandrasena said was heard outside her open window by this hunchbacked woman whom I had set to spy on her. So, you are the one with whom poor Kandukāvati has fallen in love, and I am the one who has to stay as your ward! And yours will be the orders not daring to disobey which I will hand over Chandrasena to Kośa Dāsa!' Saying this, he ordered one of the men by his side: 'Throw him into the sea.'

The man looked as pleased as if he had won a kingdom. ‘As you command, Sire,’ he said, and promptly did as he had been instructed. I was helpless. Thrashing my arms here and there, I clasped to my breast a piece of wood which destiny brought near me, and kept swimming till one whole day and night had passed. At dawn I saw a ship. The Greeks³ aboard it pulled me out and told their sea-captain who was named Rāmeshu: ‘This man was found in the water, chained in iron fetters. He looks as if he will be able to irrigate a thousand grape vines at one time.’

At that instant a warship accompanied by many other vessels came upon us. The Greeks were frightened. Our ship was surrounded by fast boats like a boar by dogs, and a battle commenced which the Greeks began to lose. I reassured them, saying: ‘Take off my fetters. I will destroy your enemies.’ This being done, I showered arrows upon our assailants with dreadful twangs of the bow, pulverizing their limbs. I then leapt into the enemy ship which was alongside ours, its warriors dead or wounded, and attacked its helpless commander, seizing him alive. He turned out to be none other than Bhīmadhanvā. Aware of his humiliation as the merchant-sailors bound him tightly in my own chains, while they greeted me with loud cheers, I said to the prince: ‘My dear, do you see now the turns which luck can take?’

Meanwhile our ship was caught in an unfavourable wind and irresistibly swept far away till it came to rest by the side of an island. We cast our stone anchor there, wishing to collect water, fuel and edible materials and found ourselves near a great mountain.

‘What a lovely hillside,’ I thought, ‘this valley full of fragrant resins is even more charming. The cool water of the mountain stream, glittering like peacock feathers with drops of lotus nectar, and this expanse of forest full of trees and creepers with many coloured flowers is delightful.’ Looking avidly at these sights, I soon reached the top of the mountain without realizing it. There I found an extraordinary tank with steps of ruby rocks leading to the water which looked pale as lotus pollen in their roseate glow. I bathed in it and tasted some sweet bits of lotus stalk. As I came out with a white lotus at my shoulder, a Brahmin ogre⁴ of terrifying aspect suddenly appeared on the tankside.

‘Who are you? From where have you come?’ the ogre thundered.

‘Gentle sir,’ I replied without fear, ‘I am of the twice born. I have passed from my enemies’ hands into the sea, from there into the ship of the Greeks, and from thence to this excellent mountainside with the colourful stones. Now I am just resting at this lake. May all be well with you.’

‘I will devour you if you do not answer my questions,’ he said.

‘Then, ask,’ I replied. Our conversation proceeded thereafter in verse set to the āryā⁵ metre:

‘What is cruel?’

‘A woman’s heart.’

‘What benefits man?’

‘The spouse’s virtues.’

‘Which wish comes true?’

‘The firm resolve.’

‘What finds solutions?’

‘Using the mind.’

‘The proofs of these,’ I said, ‘are the tales of Dhūminī, Gominī, Nimbavati and Nitambavati.’ He asked: ‘Explain them,’ and I commenced.

The Tale of Dhūminī

In the land of Trigarta⁶ there lived three brothers named Dhanaka, Dhānyaka and Dhanyaka, who were wealthy householders. During their lifetime once it did not rain for twelve years. The crops failed. The plants became barren and the trees fruitless. The clouds were impotent, the rivers went dry, the springs lost their flow and only mud remained in the ponds. There was little conversation. Festivals ceased to be celebrated. Banditry increased. The populace started to eat one another. Human skulls white as the crane’s wing rolled here and there, and flocks of famished crows circled overhead. The cities and the villages, the towns and the suburbs, all became deserted.

These householders consumed all their stores of grain. Then they ate their goats and sheep, their buffaloes, their herds of cows, and even their servants and their children one by one. Finally, having eaten the wives of the elder and the middle brother in turn, they decided that the youngest brother’s wife, Dhūminī, should be eaten the following day.

Dhanyaka the youngest, unable to eat his beloved, fled with her that very night. Carrying her on his shoulders when she was tired with the strain of travel, and slaking her hunger and thirst with his own flesh and blood, he eventually entered a forest. There he saw a man writhing on the ground, whose ears and nose, hands and feet had been cut off. Moved to compassion, he picked up this mutilatee on his shoulders also, and finally reached a part of the forest which was full of edible plants and animals. There he built with great effort a hut of

leaves in which they lived for a long time.

Making no difference between the other man and himself, Dhanyaka nursed his wounds with the oil of ingudi and similar medicinal herbs, and fed him with meat and vegetables till he became strong and his vigour was restored. Once, when Dhanyaka had gone to gather food, Dhūminī approached the other with a carnal desire. He scolded her but she nevertheless took him by force. When her husband returned and asked for some water, she flung the pail and the line before him, saying, 'Draw it yourself from the well, and drink. I have a headache.' And when he was drawing the water, she went behind him and quickly pushed him into the well.

Thereafter, carrying the mutilatee on her shoulders, she wandered from place to place, and became famous and highly respected as a devoted wife. Eventually, with the patronage of the King of Avanti, she began to live there in great comfort.

Some merchants searching for water found and rescued Dhūminī's husband who then came wandering to Avanti in search of food. When she saw him she got the king unknowingly to sentence that good man to death by torture, saying: 'This is the wretch who mutilated my husband.'

But Dhanyaka's time had not yet come. While being led to the scaffold with his hands tied behind him, he told the officers fearlessly: 'My punishment will be just if the beggar, who is supposed to have been mutilated by me, were himself to say that I committed the crime.' 'What is the harm?' they said, and they took him and showed him to the mutilatee.

When that honest soul saw Dhanyaka, he fell at his feet with tears in his eyes; and narrated his good deeds together with the misdeeds committed by that wicked woman. The king was enraged, and had her disfigured and put her to feeding the dogs, while Dhanyaka became a recipient of royal favours.

Therefore I say that a woman's heart is cruel.

Asked again, I then recounted the tale of Gomini.

The Tale of Gomini

There is a city called Kanchi in the Dravidian country. Once upon a time there lived in it a rich merchant's son named Śakti Kumāra who was a multi-millionaire himself. When he was in his eighteenth year, he began to consider: 'There is no happiness without a wife for

certain, moreover without one who is congenial. So how should I set about finding a spouse with the necessary qualities?’ Not discerning these in matrimonial matches suggested by others, he disguised himself as a soothsayer who makes divinations by interpreting bodily marks, and took to wandering with a measure of unhusked rice tied in the end of his garment.

Considering him a diviner, parents would show their daughters to him. Whenever he saw one of his own caste with the right bodily attributes, he would ask: ‘Gentle one, can you make a nice meal for me with this measure of unhusked rice?’ But he would be mocked and ridiculed, and wandered thus from house to house.

Eventually, he saw a girl in the town of Shibi on the banks of the river Kāveri. She lived with her parents who had lost their wealth and whose house was in ruins. She wore few ornaments and was shown to him by a nursemaid. Scrutinizing her, he reasoned as follows:

‘All the limbs of this maiden are pure in complexion and without any blemish. They are neither too gross nor too meagre, not too long or too short. The inner sides of her fingers are pink, and the palms of her hands bear many auspicious signs like the barley grain, the fish, the lotus, and the jar. Her ankles are even. Her feet are plump and unmarked by veins. Her well-rounded calves so merge into ample thighs that the knees are hardly noticeable. The bottom is smooth, perfectly divided, beautifully dimpled and round as a wheel. The navel is small, a little low and deep. A triple line adorns the abdomen. A large bosom with upturned nipples covers the breast. The shoulders slope smoothly into supple arms. The fingernails have the fine gloss of gems. The fingers are tapering, soft, and copper-hued. The palms have lines indicating an abundance of wealth and children.

‘Her neck is slender and graceful like a conchshell. Her face is like a lotus flower, with lips red and rounded, nose like a flower bud, handsome chin and shapely temples. Her forehead shines like the crescent moon and her wavy hair like a line of sapphires. Her dark eyebrows are arched and well-separated, and her eyes are bright and wide with a glance both merry and languorous.

‘Her ears are ornamented only with loops of pale lotus stems. Her abundant hair is dark and fragrant and simply dressed. Such an appearance cannot but reflect character. My heart is attracted to her. But she must be tested before I may marry her. For it is certain that those who act without reflection have many a cause for regret.’

Then, looking at her tenderly, he said: ‘Gentle one, do you have the skill to make me a complete meal with this measure of unhusked

rice?’

The girl looked meaningfully at her old nursemaid. Then she took the measure of grain from his hands, and giving him some water for washing his feet, seated him near the threshold in a place she had swept and cleaned. Rubbing and drying the husks in the sun, and lightly beating them with a pestle on a flat and hard piece of ground, she separated the unbroken grain from them. Addressing the nursemaid, she said: ‘Mother, this husk is sought by goldsmiths as it is useful for polishing jewellery. Give it to them and, with the money you get, bring a small cooking pot, a pair of clay cups, and some solid firewood, neither too green nor too dry.’

While this was being done, she pounded the grain with a skilful rhythm in a large wooden mortar with a heavy iron-tipped pestle till her arms were tired. Then she winnowed the rice, washed out the grit and, having worshipped the fire, put it on to cook in five times its quantity of boiling water.

When the rice was well done, and the grains had softened and swelled sufficiently, she reduced the fire and strained out the rice water. Stirring the rice with a ladle to see that it was evenly cooked, she then took the pot off. After that she put out the fire with water, turning the remaining firewood into charcoal. This she sent to the market, asking that with the proceeds from its sale, some greens, tamarind and āmlā berries, and some butter, oil and curds be brought. This having been done, she prepared a few greens and, cooling the rice water in the new clay cup with a palm-leaf fan, she flavoured it with salt and scented it with incense smoke.

Making a paste of the amla berries with lotus fragrance, she then asked Sakti Kumara through the nursemaid to have a bath. She herself had already bathed. He took the oil and āmlā given by her and also had a bath.

Thereafter he was seated on a low stool which had been placed on the washed and cleaned floor. He touched the still wet pair of cups presented before him on a pale green leaf taken from the banana tree in the courtyard. She served him first with the rice water as a beverage. The refreshing drink took away the fatigue of his journey and his body glistened as he sat. Then she gave him two ladles of rice with a little butter, some broth and the vegetables, and served the remainder with spiced buttermilk and a sour soup.

Having eaten his fill he asked for some water. She poured it out from a carafe in which it had been perfumed with incense smoke and with rose and lotus petals. He drank it from a cup held to his mouth.

The ice cold droplets wet his eyelashes, and their sprinkling sound pleased his ears. His temple tingled with the touch of her hand. His nostrils were filled with fragrance and his mouth with sweetness. He drank his fill and when, with a shake of his head he signalled her to stop, the girl gave him the other cup for rinsing his mouth. Meanwhile, the old woman had removed his leftovers. He spread his upper garment on the freshly plastered floor, and lay down for a while to sleep.

Thus he was fully satisfied. He married the girl with due ceremony and led her away. Later he neglected her and took a harlot as a concubine. But the girl treated even her as a dear friend, and served her husband indefatigably as if he were a god. She ran the house with competence, and won over the servants with generosity. Eventually her husband was captivated by her virtues, and placed all his family, together with himself under her control. Thus, they enjoyed the threefold ends of life.

Therefore it is said: ‘The virtues of the wife are the householder’s benefit.’

On his asking me, I then related the story of Nimbavatī.

The Tale of Nimbavatī

There is a city called Valabhī⁷ in Saurashtra. In it there lived Ratnavatī, the daughter of a shipowner named Griha Gupta who was as rich as the god of wealth himself. She was married to a merchant’s son called Balabhadra who had come from Madhumatī. But as a new bride she was too impetuous, and disturbed the pleasures of love so that her husband soon took a great dislike to her. He did not wish to see her again, and, despite the advice of many well-wishers, was ashamed even to visit her house. From that time her relatives and friends also forsook her, saying ‘She is not Ratnavatī, the jewel. She is Nimbavatī, a lemon.’

After some time this unhappy woman, wondering ‘what shall I do’, happened to meet an old motherly nun carrying flowers left over from the rituals of worship. She burst into tears before her. The nun’s eyes also filled with tears and, consoling her in many ways, she asked why she was weeping.

Even though she was embarrassed, so desperate was her situation that she said somehow: ‘What can I say, mother? The husband’s disfavour is indeed a living death for women, specially for respectable

women. I am an example of this. Starting with my own mother, all my relatives look on me only with contempt. Do something so that they may think well of me. Otherwise I will give up this useless life today itself. My secret is unfit to be revealed till after my death.' And she fell at her feet.

Lifting her up, the nun said tenderly: 'Child, do not do anything desperate. I am here to carry out your wishes. I am at your disposal for as long as I can be of any use. If you have lost interest in this world, you are welcome to enter holy orders under my supervision for the benefit of your next life. It is certainly because of past sins that, despite such a personality, character, family and wealth, you have nevertheless incurred your husband's enmity all of a sudden. But you are intelligent, and if there is some method for countering his animosity, do mention it.'

She looked down and thought for a moment, and then said with a deep and burning sigh: 'Lady, the husband alone is the god for women, specially for those of good family. Whatever can serve him should be done. We have a neighbour who is a merchant. He surpasses all the other citizens in his lineage, his wealth and his nearness to the king. His daughter Kanakavati is a very dear friend of mine, and like me in physical appearance. I will go to her seven-storeyed mansion and sport with her there, dressed twice as beautifully. You should bring my husband there somehow, saying tenderly that Kanakavati's mother has called him. When you come near I will drop a ball, making out that I am engrossed in play.

'Then you should give the ball in his hands, saying: "Son, this is your wife's friend Kanakavati. She is the daughter of Nidhipati Datta, the chief of all the merchants. She always blames you on account of Ratnavati, saying that you are fickle and cruel. She is your adversary. But return her property." Thus addressed and urged by you, he will definitely face me and, thinking that I am my dear friend, he will salute me and return the ball into my outstretched hands with ardour. But it must be so arranged that he also has an excuse to embrace me, reveal his desire, and make a rendezvous to take me away.'

She acted accordingly with great joy. And Balabhadra, deceived by the old nun that his wife was actually Kanakavati, went for her in the dark night with a load of jewels, ornaments and money. Meanwhile the nun spread the rumour: 'Balabhadra told me yesterday: "I was a fool to have neglected Ratnavati without cause, insulted her parents and not heeded the advice of friends. I am ashamed to live here in the same place as her." He has certainly taken her away. The secret will

be out soon.’ Hearing this Balabhadra’s relatives slackened their efforts to go in search of him.

Ratnavatī hired a maidservant on the way to carry their food and other goods, and went to Khetakapura. Balabhadra was a clever trader. Starting with a small capital, he soon earned great wealth there, and became the leading citizen of the place. With his affluence he engaged many servants. One day he upbraided the first maidservant, ‘You do not work. You steal whatever you see. You speak rudely,’ and gave her a thrashing. Much annoyed, the girl made public some of the secrets she had been told in their happier times together. Hearing them a greedy magistrate went to the city elders, complaining: ‘This villain Balabhadra is living in our city after having abducted Nidhipati Datta’s daughter Kanakavatī. You should permit the confiscation of all his property.’

Balabhadra was frightened. But Ratnavatī told him: ‘Do not fear. Say this is not Nidhipati Datta’s daughter Kanakavatī. This is Ratnavatī, the daughter of Griha Gupta of Valabhī, who was legally married to me with her father’s consent. If you do not believe me, send your detectives to her family.’

Balabhadra testified accordingly, and remained on bail furnished by the merchants guild till Griha Gupta came to Khetakapura on receiving a letter from the city, and took his daughter and son-in-law away with great joy. Thereafter Ratnavatī was greatly beloved by Balabhadra who realized that she had become Kanakavatī for his sake.

Therefore I say that a wish, to come true, must be firmly resolved.

Thereafter he asked about the tale of Nitambavatī. I said:

The Tale of Nitambavatī

In the Śūrasena country there is a city called Mahturā.⁸ In it there lived a man of the Śūdra caste, a lover of courtesans and all the arts. He had on his own strength settled many altercations for his friends, and was well known among common people by the name of Kalaha-Kantaka or Trouble-Shooter.

Once Kalaha-Kantaka saw a portrait carried by a visiting artist. The sight alone of the woman depicted in it aroused desire in his heart. ‘Sir,’ he said to the artist, ‘this portrait seems full of contradictions. Such a figure is rare for a woman of good family. Yet the modest demeanour shows respectable lineage. The face looks fresh and the body inexperienced, but the glance is full of maturity. The hair is not worn in a single braid, nor are there other signs to indicate that her

lord has gone away. The nail marks are moreover on the right side. So it must be the wife of some old and less than virile merchant, suffering from the absence of the pleasures she deserves, whom you have so expertly and faithfully portrayed.'

Complimenting him, the artist said: 'It is true. She is the wife of Ananta Kīrti, a merchant of Ujjayinī in Avanti. She is appropriately named Nitambavatī or Beautiful Hips. I was so struck by her beauty that I painted her thus.'

Such was Kalaha-Kantaka's eagerness to see her that he set off for Ujjayinī there and then. Disguising himself as an astrologer, he entered her house on the pretence of seeking alms and saw her there. This excited his desire even more. Coming out of the house, he went to the city elders and requested appointment as the guard of the cremation ground, which he obtained. There he began to cultivate a Buddhist nun called Arhantika with gifts of shrouds and other things he took from the dead bodies.

Through Arhantikā he sent secret messages to Nitambavatī. But she repelled the advances and rebuked the nun. Learning from the latter that it is difficult to dislodge respectable women from the path of virtue, he instructed his messenger secretly: 'Go once more to the merchant's wife. Tell her in private, "How is it possible that a person like me, who has seen the wickedness of the world and now seeks only salvation through yoga, should try to ruin the virtue of respectable women? I tested you to see if you, with your great wealth, extraordinary beauty and first bloom of youth, have at all been touched by the fickleness common to other women. I am satisfied by your pure disposition. Now I would like to see you with a child. Your husband, afflicted by some star and weakened by anaemia, has lost his virility. Without curing his disability it is not possible to have a child from him. But, be happy. Come alone to the orchard. I will bring a necromancer there and in private you should place your foot in his hand and let him put a spell on it. Then, pretending to be scorned in love, you should kick your husband on the chest. His vigour will thereby increase and he will become capable of producing strong children. He will also follow you devotedly as if you were a goddess. There is no doubt about this!"

'Spoken to in this way, she will certainly agree. At night, after letting me into the orchard, you should also bring her there. I will forever be grateful to you.'

The nun arranged matters accordingly. That very night he went happily to the orchard, and Nitambavatī was persuaded to come there

by the nun. Making as if to touch her foot, he took off her gold anklet and, scarring her in the lower thigh with a knife, he quickly ran away.

She was deeply frightened. Cursing her own folly, and wishing the nun were dead, she washed the wound in the tank by her house and put a bandage on it. Then pretending to be ill, she removed her other anklet and took to bed. In this way she passed the next few days.

Meanwhile that rogue went to Ananta Kirti with the anklet, saying that he wished to sell it. The merchant recognized it as his wife's ornament and insisted on knowing how he had got it. But he remained silent, saying only that he would give an explanation before the merchant's guild.

The merchant sent a message to his wife asking her to send her pair of anklets to him. She replied with fear and embarrassment: 'Tonight, when I had gone to the orchard to rest, one of my anklets fell off as it was fastened loosely. It has not been found despite a search. Here is the second one.' And she sent the other anklet. With this information, and taking Kalaha-Kantaka with him, the merchant went to the meeting of his guild.

Questioned at the meeting, the rascal said respectfully: 'It is known to you that, with your permission, I guard the cremation ground and live there to earn my bread. I also sleep at night in the cremation ground so that greedy people may not attempt to burn corpses at that time for fear of being seen by me. The other night I saw a dark feminine form forcefully dragging a half-burnt corpse from the pyre. Suppressing my fear for the sake of my salary, I caught hold of her and took this anklet off her foot while wounding her in the lower thigh with my knife. But she ran away quickly. This is how I came by this anklet. The rest it is for you gentlemen to decide.'

After a discussion the city elders came unanimously to the conclusion that Nitambavati was a witch. Thrown out by her husband, weeping and wishing to die, she went to hang herself in the cremation ground, and that scoundrel got hold of her at night. Then he pleaded with her: 'Beautiful one, maddened by your charms I made many attempts through the nun to win you, but they were all unsuccessful. Finally, I arranged this so that I may enjoy the rest of my life with you who are the best. So have mercy on me, for this servant of yours has nowhere else to go.' Falling again and again at her feet, and giving her hundreds of assurances, he finally got her under his control, specially as she had nowhere else to go.

Hence it is said that intelligence can accomplish even that which is most difficult.

After hearing these accounts the Brahmin ogre became very respectful towards me. At that instant drops of water fell from the sky together with pearls as large as new bakula⁹ flower buds. 'What is this?' I said, and looking up beheld another ogre in the process of dragging a struggling young woman. 'Look at that wicked ogre!' I cried, lamenting that I was unarmed and unable to move in the sky. 'He is abducting a woman against her will.' At that the Brahmin ogre with me leapt up, shouting: 'Stop! Stop! You wretch, where are you taking her?' and grappled with the other ogre. The latter angrily dropped the woman without any ado; she fell like a spray of flowers from the tree of paradise and, stretching out both my hands towards her, I caught her in my arms.

She was trembling. Her eyes were closed and her skin bristled with the pleasure of contact with my body. For some time I stood holding her in that condition, without putting her down. Meanwhile the two ogres destroyed each other with blows and kicks and volleys of rocks and hastily uprooted trees. I then placed her by the side of the tank on some soft, sandy ground strewn with flower petals and, examining her attentively, discovered that she was none other than the one beloved of my life, the princess Kandukāvati.

She too scrutinized me from the corner of her eyes as I comforted her, and wept tenderly as recognition dawned. 'Lord,' she said, 'I fell in love with you at that Ball Festival. My friend Chandrasena assured me with news about you. But when I learnt that you had been drowned in the middle of the sea by my wicked brother Bhīmadhanvā, I left my friends and servants and went alone to the garden, wishing to give up my life. There this base ogre, who could change his appearance according to his will, propositioned me. I was frightened and rejected his advances whereupon he seized me as I trembled, and fled. Here he has perished and by a stroke of fate I have fallen into the arms of my own beloved. May all be well with you.'

Thereafter I came down with her from the mountain and boarded the ship which lifted anchor and sailed before a wind from the opposite direction. We reached Damalīpta and disembarked without any difficulty. A tearful populace there was lamenting: 'Tungadhanvā, the aged king of Suhma, has again become childless after the loss of his son and daughter. He has left with his wife for the pure banks of the river Gangā to starve himself to death. The elders of the city are devoted to him and, bereft of their master, they also wish to die with him.' Hearing this I recounted the entire tale to the king, and reunited both his children with him. The lord of Dāmālīpta was overjoyed and

made me his son-in-law. His son became my dependant. On my instructions he gave up Chandrasenā, who was like his life, and also became friendly to Kośa Dāsa. I came here to help Simha Varmā, and now have the pleasure, my lord, of seeing you.

‘The ways of fate are strange,’ said King Rājavāhana, ‘but your prowess at the right time was tremendous.’ He then cast a joyful look at the smiling Mantra Gupta who began his tale with his face partially covered with his hand: for his lower lip had been hurt by the passionate love-bites of his beautiful inamorata, and he could not pronounce the labial sounds.

The Tale of Mantra Gupta

Prince, searching for you after you had gone down the cave in the mountain, I came eventually to the Kalinga¹ country. Not too far from the city of Kalinga there is a place for burning the dead, and next to it there is a forest. There I made a bed of new leaves under a tree, and lay down, bleary-eyed with sleep. Night had fallen and darkness had spread its tentacles. It was a time when evil spirits stir out and all men withdraw into their homes. Dew fell heavily and by midnight it had become bitterly cold.

A sound inside the dense foliage drove away the sleep brushing my eyes. It was a piteous wailing, as of a slave for its mate: ‘Alas, how I am set upon by this wicked sorcerer. I am torn by longing, but he wishes to give orders at a time meant for making love. How I wish someone capable enough could disrupt the rites this vilest of men is performing.’

I was filled with curiosity: ‘Who is this sorcerer? What are these rites? What is the slave being asked to do?’ Going some distance in the direction of the voice, I saw a man. His body was covered with ornaments made of bright pieces of human bones, and smeared with the ash of burnt wood. His matted hair spread like streaks of lightning. With his left hand² he threw constantly crackling sesame and white mustard seeds and other offerings into a fire which lit up a circle in the dark forest, with flames leaping incessantly as they fed on this variegated fuel. In front of him stood the slave with hands clasped together, asking: ‘What is to be done? Please give your orders.’

‘Go,’ ordered that devil, ‘bring here from the women’s quarters Kanaka Lekhā, daughter of Kardana, the King of Kalinga.’ This was done, and she stood there, weeping with fear and crying for her parents, her voice choked with tears and heart heavy with anxiety. The coronet on her head was disarrayed and its band undone as the sorcerer seized her by the hair and attempted to sever her neck with a

sword he had meanwhile sharpened on a stone. I quickly snatched the weapon from his hand and cut off his head with its matted locks, which I then placed inside the hollow trunk of an old tree nearby.

The slave turned out to be a demon. He was very pleased and relieved to see what had happened. ‘Sir,’ he said to me, ‘I could never sleep because of the trouble this tormentor gave me. He scolded, threatened and gave orders for improper acts. Your Beatitude has done well to send this evil man to death’s kingdom where he can sample the tortures of hell. You are kind as well as powerful, and this slave would be glad to carry out any orders that you may give.’ Saluting me, he added: ‘Let us not lose time. Please command me.’

I told him: ‘Friend, this is indeed the way in which good people behave, displaying great respect even for slight services. This delicate lady is not used to hardships; but that scoundrel made her suffer excessively. Take her back to her home. Nothing will please me more.’

Hearing this, the princess looked at me askance with flashing eyes which matched the blue lotus flowers pinned above her ears. Her brows arched lazily, like the bended bow of Kāma. Her temples bristled and blushed as she hovered between modesty and desire. Scratching the ground with her curved toenail³ which glowed like the moon, she turned away her face as tears of rapture flowed past her lips, their drops streaking the sandalwood unguent on her breast. A slight sigh escaped her mouth, shimmering like moonlight on her teeth. But it had the force of Kāma’s arrows, proficient in piercing hearts, as she uttered these words in a sweet nightingale voice: ‘Noble sir, having rescued this slave from the hands of death, why are you now flinging her into the sea of Kāma, where the wind of love causes waves of longing to rise? Consider me as the dust of your own feet. This handmaid should be given the special privilege of serving at your feet, if you have any pity for her. If you apprehend that the secret of your stay in the women’s quarters may get revealed and create problems, it will not be so. My friends and servants are extremely devoted to me. We will ensure that no one comes to know anything.’

Kāma drew his bowstring to the ear and struck me without mercy in the heart. The princess’ glances bound me in a chain of iron. Fixing my gaze on the slave, I said: ‘Kāma will destroy me if I do not do what this round-hipped maiden says. Therefore take me with her to the women’s quarters.’ I was then taken by the demon to the seraglio which shone like a mass of autumn clouds. For some time I stayed in a room upstairs, my calm shaken as I looked at the princess. She woke up some of her women, gently shaking them out of their carefree

slumber and explaining the situation to them. They came to me and bowed their heads at my feet. Their eyes welled with tears and their soft voices were like the drone of bees which frequent the bakula flowers now wreathed in their hair.

‘Noble sir,’ they said haltingly, ‘your power surpasses that of the sun-god. If our mistress was not taken by the god of death, it was only because she had already come to your notice. The love-god, like a father, has given her to you in marriage, with the fire of passion as the witness. Your breast is as firm as the gem-laden rocks of a mountain. Ornament it now with the glow of this marvellous jewel. Favour her bosom with the deep embraces of the closest companion.’ Thus did her very amiable and clever women strengthen our bonds of affection as I and that damsel came together in dalliance and delight.

The time soon arrived which always dejects the hearts of separated lovers. It is the season when dense bakula blossoms reel under the onslaught of greedy bees; when the forest shines with tilaka flowers on its brow; when King Kāma accepts the pretty golden parasols of the blooming karṇikāra;⁴ and when the southern breeze blows away the bees on mango buds. Passion stalks the minds of bashful maidens in this season, crossing the bounds of modesty; and red-lipped girls, enamoured by the nightingale’s music, engage for the first time in battles of love, even as cool, sandal-scented zephyrs teach the vines how to dance.

At that time the King of Kalinga, who was addicted to the pleasures of sport, spent thirteen days with his women, his daughter, and all the leading citizens in a forest by the seaside. The sandy beach there was cooled by the spray of the restless sea waves, and covered with drooping vines whose new leaves swarmed with buzzing bees and kept out the sun. There the king enjoyed unrestrained contests of love, with many women frolicking seductively to the accompaniment of endless music and dance. He was taken up entirely with the pursuit of passion. The King of Āndhra,⁵ Jaya Siṃha, took this opportunity to mount a quick attack with a large sea-borne force, and seized the Kalinga king together with his spouse. My beloved Kanaka Lekhā, her eyes stricken with fear, was also taken together with her companions.

Pale with worry for my sweetheart, aflame with longing and unable even to think of food, I said to myself: ‘The Princess of Kalinga, together with her parents, has fallen into the hands of the enemy. That king will for certain lose control over himself and wish to possess her. She is virtuous and will kill herself immediately with poison rather than tolerate his advances. If this comes to pass, love will also put an

end to my life. What a prospect!’

A Brahmin arrived meanwhile from the town of Āndhra, and had this tale to tell: ‘Jaya Simha wishes to kill Kardana with the stress and strain of all kinds of humiliations; but the latter has been protected by the former’s increasing infatuation after seeing Kanaka Lekhā. That girl, however, is possessed by some Yaksha and will not come before any man. The King of Āndhra has attempted to get her exorcised by a group of physicians he has assembled; but he has not met with any success.’

This gave me hope. I took out the matted hair from the hollow of the old tree in the cremation ground, and putting them on and covering my body with an ancient patchwork of rags, collected a number of disciples. I kept them happy with gifts of food and clothing which I extracted from the populace with many marvellous tricks. After a few days we went to the Āndhra capital.

I camped in a wood at some distance from the city, by the side of a vast lake with a flock of cranes at its head, and its waters dappled with pollen dust from lotus petals crushed by swans. Many citizens were attracted by the extraordinary deeds described by my disciples, and I duped them all with such skill that it was said by people everywhere: ‘There is an ascetic who lies on sanctified ground at the shore of the lake in the old forest. He knows all the Vedas by heart, including the secret sections and the six branches, as well as the other scriptures. Anyone unable to understand them properly can get a decisive explanation by going to this sage. There is no falsehood in him, and he is compassion personified. With his support religious initiation is now worthwhile again after a long time. Many people with maladies, which were long incurable by physicians, have now been cured by strewing grains of dust from his feet on their heads. Malefic effects of stars and planets, uncontrollable by all the techniques of exorcists, can be neutralized instantaneously by sprinkling on the head some water in which his feet have been washed. His powers appear limitless. But there is not even a trace of egotism in him.’

This story made its rounds through word of mouth and eventually attracted the attention of the King of Āndhra. His warrior mind was already obsessed with exorcising the Yaksha who had made Kanaka Lekhā his abode. He began to come daily and propitiate my disciples with respectful behaviour and gifts of money. Getting the opportunity one day, he quietly made a request for the realization of his goal.

I sat still, in deep meditation. After scrutinizing him and concluding

that he was a fit case for the display of my wisdom, I told him: 'My child, this effort is entirely proper. That jewel among maidens is the sole repository of all the auspicious attributes. To have her will indeed be the means for obtaining possession of the whole earth with its girdle of the milky ocean, and its radiant garland of the Gangā and a thousand other rivers. But the Yaksha inside her will not tolerate any exorcist looking into her lovely blue-lotus eyes. So, wait for three days; I will make an effort for the attainment of your objective.'

The king went away, pleased with what I had told him. After he had gone, I too came out. It was a moonless night. All things were consumed in a deep darkness and everyone was fast asleep. I took some implements for digging and, near the steps which led into the lake, I dug out laboriously from the middle of the bank a recess which was accessible from inside the water. I closed the entrance to this recess tightly with stones and bricks, making certain that the bank would not arouse any suspicion. By then it was daybreak and, purifying myself with a bath, I prayed with a red lotus in my hands to the thousand-rayed sun, rising red in the east. He is the central jewel in the necklace of celestial constellations; the incomparable lion who slays the dark elephant of the night; the dancer in the pageant on the golden mountain peaks; the saurian who dares the billows on the ocean of the sky; and the witness of all good and bad deeds. After praying to him I went back to my dwelling.

The king returned after three days. By the time of his arrival, daylight had turned saffron like the mountain slopes at sunset. The sun glowed like the red-stained breast of the evening-maiden as she merges into the sky. The king stood before me, his hands clasped, his crown at my feet, reflecting my toenails. 'By good fortune,' I told him, 'the way has been found for attaining your objective. People lacking in will cannot, for certain, achieve success in this world. All good things, on the other hand, are always within the grasp of those who make the effort. You have won my heart by your virtuous and unblemished, respected and extremely respectful conduct. I have therefore so purified this lake that you can attain success today itself. You should enter it after midnight has passed, and lie under the water, holding your breath for as long as you can. Within a few moments you will hear a sound of water, such as one may hear when listening to the frightened cry of a swan hurt by the thorns on aquatic plants shaken by the water lapping on the shore. You should come out when the sound ceases. The form in which you then appear, your body wet and your eyes reddened, will be such as will delight all who behold it. The

Yaksha will not be able to withstand it. And the maiden's heart will get bound in such strong chains of love for you that she will be unable to bear your absence even for a moment. Thereafter, there is no doubt that all your enemies will be vanquished without much effort and this entire earth will fall into your hands. If you want this, then consult with those whose minds are mature with wisdom, your officers and your well-wishers. Bring divers and your trusted men, and have the inside of the lake well examined. Its banks should also be properly protected by soldiers up to a distance of thirty yards, for who knows what advantages opponents may take of any weakness?'

This appealed to the king. His officers, observing that his mind was made up because of his infatuation with the princess, did not object to the scheme, nor tolerate any lacunae being pointed out in it. Seeing him firm in his intention, I told him: 'O King, I have been in your country for a long time. It is not right for people like us to stay in one place for long. When your wish is fulfilled you will not see me here. Having eaten your salt, if I went away from your kingdom without doing something for you, it would have been condemned by all good people. That is why I stayed here so long. Now my work has been done. Go home, bathe properly with pleasant, perfumed water, and put on a white garland and scented unguents. You should then propitiate Brahmins, the gods on this earth, with gifts according to your capacity, and illuminate the darkness of the night with a thousand flames from tapers dipped in oil and mounted on rods. Then strive for the attainment of your goal.'

'Noble sir,' the king replied, humbly expressing his gratitude, 'my success will actually be a failure in that you will not be here. The detachment, which will lead to this innocent servant being abandoned, is most painful for him. But the wishes of respected elders cannot be opposed either.' He then went home to bathe. I too came out when all was quiet at midnight, and stationed myself inside the recess in the lake shore with my ear to a small hole I had provided in it.

The king did as he had been told. Making arrangements for security everywhere, he brought the divers after midnight to clear the lake of any internal impediments. All suspicion set at rest, he then entered the water at ease. As he reached the bottom, and lay there with his nose and ears closed and hair dishevelled, I slid into the water like a crocodile. Garotting his neck in a strip of cloth, I struck him mercilessly with hard and deadly blows of my hands and feet. Within moments he eased all movement, I then dragged his body into the

recess and, securing it there, came out of the water.

The change of appearance caused great astonishment among the soldiers who soon gathered there. I proceeded on the highway, mounted on an elephant with the white parasol and all the other symbols of royalty. The populace, frightened by the fierce blows of the staff bearers, gave way. I spent that night unable to sleep because of joy.

In time the orb of the sun appeared, like the jewel mirror of the maid of the East, or the head of the divine elephant, stained red with lac. After the morning ablutions I sat upon the shining, gem-studded royal throne. The counsellors sat near me in accordance with their positions, but they were inhibited by suspicion. Addressing them, I said: 'Look at the power of the sages. By the passionless perfection of that ascetic who had conquered his senses, the lake with its lotuses and happy bees had acquired within it another, more handsome and radiant, form which I have assumed. Today let all unbelievers hang their heads in shame. Let prayers now be held in the temples of the moon-crested Śiva, the demon-destroying Vishnu, the lotus-throned Brahmā and all the other gods, with dance and music arranged with every honour. And let supplicants take away from this house as much wealth as will help to relieve their suffering.'

The counsellors were greatly amazed and pleased. They praised me again and again: 'Lord of the world, may you fill all the directions with great victories, and match the fame of ancient kings with your own,' and went about their appointed tasks.

Meanwhile a trusted friend of my beloved, a girl called Śaśāṅkasena, came there on some other work. Taking her aside, I asked: 'Have you ever seen me before?' Beside herself with joy, she saluted me, smiling playfully and covering the buds of her lips with the pretty vine of her hand, her eyes wet with tears of happiness. 'I know very well someone like you,' she said softly, decorum overcome by affection, 'if this is not an illusion created by some magician. How did this happen? Tell me.'

I told her the whole story. My message, sent through her, delighted my sweetheart beyond measure. Thereafter the King of Kalinga honoured me and formally gave the princess to me in marriage. Joined with her in unhindered union, I became the ruler of the kingdoms of Āndhra and Kalinga. I came here with a large force to help the King of Anga who was beset by enemies. A stroke of fate has let me see you and other friends and filled my heart with bliss.

The lord Rājavāhana's lips lit with a smile as he and the other friends congratulated Mantra Gupta for his skill. 'This tale of the great sage is wonderful,' said Rājavāhana. 'It was a very hard but fruitful penance. But, jests aside, one sees here wisdom and prowess personified scaling the heights of happiness.' Looking graciously at the learned Viśruta, he then said: 'Sir, your turn.' And Viśruta too began his tale.

The Tale of Viśruta

I too became a wanderer, Sire. In the Vindhya forest I saw a boy in distress, hungry and thirsty, near a well. He was only about eight years old and did not deserve to suffer thus. ‘Your Honour, I am in trouble,’ he cried in a voice faltering with fear. ‘Help me, noble sir. I am dying of thirst and my only support, an old man, has fallen into the well. He was fetching water for me, but I cannot rescue him.’

I went there and pulled out the ancient with a wild creeper. Drawing some water with the end of a hollow bamboo, and bringing down with stones half a dozen fruit from the top of a tall bread-fruit tree, I revived the boy and sat down with the old man under the tree. ‘Father,’ I said to him, ‘who is this boy? And who, sir, are you? How did this misfortune come about?’

‘Listen, Your Honour,’ he replied tearfully. ‘In the country of Vidarbha¹ there was an ornament of the Bhoja dynasty, Punya Varma by name. He was a veritable incarnation of dharma, excellent, truthful, magnanimous and courteous. His servants loved him, and for the common people he was their guide. Glorious and manly, he was distinguished both in intellect and in appearance. He acknowledged the scriptures and made laws which were beneficial as well as easy to follow. He respected scholars, promoted servants, uplifted kinsfolk and vanquished enemies. He never gave ear to gossip or turned away from merit. Well versed in the arts, very proficient in accumulating virtue and wealth, he reciprocated even small favours with great generosity. He gave close attention to treasure and transport, carefully tested all the officers, encouraged the efficient with appropriate gifts and honours, and had immediate solutions for all problems, human or supernatural. He applied the six methods² with skill, and led the four castes in accordance with the precepts of Manu. He lived a full life doing worthy deeds and, when the good fortune of his subjects was exhausted, he passed away to join the gods.’

‘After Punya Varmā the rule passed to Ananta Varmā. He was possessed of similar majesty but, though he had all the virtues, it so happened that he did not give sufficient attention to the science of politics. Once Vasu Raksita, an aged and experienced minister much respected by his father, addressed him in private: “My child, all the manly virtues are amply revealed in Your Honour’s person by your dynastic heritage itself. Your intellect is naturally sharp. Its comprehension of music, dance and the other arts, and of the diverse range of poetry, exceeds that of others. Even so, without being burnished by the science of politics, your intellect cannot shine at its brightest, just like gold unpurified in fire. In the absence of this quality a king, no matter how exalted, does not realize when he is dominated by enemies. He is unable to discriminate between ends and means in his actions and, his works frustrated by unsuitable conduct, he loses the respect of his own people as well as outsiders. The commands of one who is not respected cannot conduce to the people’s prosperity and security. The people disobey orders, speak and do whatever they please, and disrupt all discipline. A society without discipline leads to downfall: its own as well as that of its leader in both this and the next world. The path lighted by the sacred sciences can alone lead to happiness for society. The sacred sciences indeed provide an extraordinary and unhindered insight of subjects past, present and future, concealed or absent. Without that insight man cannot judge the meaning of things, and is no better than a blind creature even though he may have pretty eyes. Therefore give up the pursuit of other learning, and apply yourself to politics. It is your family science. By its practice you will obtain capabilities with which you can rule this sea-girt earth for a long time, your orders unchallenged.”

“The king heard this, and saying, “The preceptor has spoken well, it will be done accordingly,” he went into the harem. There he talked about it in the course of conversation with the women. A retainer from his childhood days, Vihāra Bhadra by name, was sitting close by. He was a well-known favourite, a companion in music and dance, a womanizer, clever, outspoken and quickwitted. Always ready to pry into the affairs of others, he was also an accomplished carrier of tales who enjoyed criticizing and ridiculing others. A tutor of all wicked conduct, he took bribes even from the ministers, and gave the lead in practices of pleasure. Overhearing the conversation, he addressed the

king with a smile.

“Sire,” he said, “if a kind fate makes someone prosperous, he is always beset suddenly by rogues with all kinds of blandishments to serve their own ends. For example, some inspire him with hopes that even greater prosperity will be forthcoming in the next world. Making him lie down without food, head shaved, body smeared with butter, guided with ropes of holy grass and clothed in an animal skin, they take away all his possessions. Others, even more terrible charlatans, relieve one of children, spouse, freedom, even life. If someone is clever enough not to be allured by such mirages, he is surrounded by other rogues who say: ‘If the path shown by us is followed, we can convert even one copper into a hundred thousand Silver coins, eliminate all enemies without using any weapons, and make even an individual with no support an emperor.’

“If he should ask those rogues: ‘What is the path?’ they tell him: ‘There are four sciences worthy of the king’s study: the Vedas, husbandry, philosophy and politics. Of these the first three are very extensive and their benefits are comparatively small. They should be kept aside, to begin with. The first to be learnt should be politics. It was condensed into six thousand verses by the teacher Vishnu Gupta³ for the Mauryas. Learnt and properly applied, it can give the results already mentioned.’

“He concurs. He grows old, studying and hearing discourses. But the science of politics is connected with other sciences as well. Its essence cannot be grasped without knowing the entire literature. Let the time for learning be long or short. Whatever is learnt emphasizes right from the beginning that even wife and children are not to be trusted. The rice to be cooked, even for oneself alone, should be given only after weighing and measuring that so much will suffice, and that so much fuel will be adequate for cooking it.

“The king wakes up and, putting a handful or half of food inside his yet unclean mouth, he must spend the first watch, or eighth, of the day listening to an account of revenue and expenditure in its entirety. Even as he listens, the cunning officials embezzle twice the amount of the income, contriving with great intelligence a thousand different forms out of the forty methods of revenue collection prescribed by Chāṇakya.⁴

“He lives through the second watch in torment, his ears deafened by the angry shouts of citizens disputing with each other. There also the judges and others decide, for or against, according to their own inclinations. They earn demerit and obloquy for their master and

much wealth for themselves. In the third watch he gets to bathe and to eat. But, having eaten, there is the fear of poison; and it does not subside till the repast itself has been digested.

“The fourth watch is spent with hands outstretched to receive the dues of gold. In the fifth the king experiences the great weariness of pondering over advice. The advisors appear impartial. But, meeting each other in secret, they wilfully distort the words of envoys and spies; the faults and the merits of the place, the time and the task. Ostensibly pacifying disaffection, they encourage it privately, within and without, and draw sustenance from friends in the opposition or their own side, while tying a dependent master into knots.

“The sixth watch of the day is free for recreation or consultation. But the time available for the former lasts no more than three and three-quarters of *nāḍikās*.⁵ The seventh watch is occupied with the labour of inspecting the four wings of the army, and the eighth with the travail of discussing its prowess with the commander-in-chief. Then, after the evening prayers, the spies must be received in the first watch of the night, and cold-hearted cut-throats, arsonists and poisoners appointed through them.

“In the second watch of the night, after dinner, the king recites the Vedas as if he were a learned Brahmin. In the third he retires for the night to the sound of trumpets, and spends the fourth and the fifth watches lying down; for how can the poor fellow have the pleasure of sleep when his mind is afflicted and overwrought by endless worries? In the sixth, deliberations begin once more on the laws and the works in hand. Envoys must be consulted and dispatched in the seventh watch. Their words, for certain, are intended to please both sides. Subtly generating work where none exists, they travel incessantly, and also increase their wealth by trade on toll-free routes.

“The priests and suchlike arrive in the eighth watch of the night. ‘A bad dream was seen tonight,’ they say, ‘the planets are ill-positioned. The omens are inauspicious. A pacification must be carried out. All the implements for the sacrifice must be made of gold. This will make the ritual efficacious. These Brahmins are virtually like the god Brahma. The ritual of pacification performed by them will be extremely beneficial. They are versed in the sacrifice and full of energy. But they are stricken with poverty, have many children, and have not received any gifts to this day. Presents to them will yield long life and paradise thereafter, and dispel all adversities.’ Arranging numerous donations in this way, the priests themselves enjoy their proceeds in secret.

“The king thus spends his days and nights in utmost exertion and ceaseless torment. Not even a trace of happiness is ordained for him. Leave aside empire, the safeguarding of his own territory can be difficult enough. All the gifts, honours and fine words proffered by him on the advice of learned experts are considered as trickery and met with disbelief. And lack of credibility is the mother of misfortunes for kings. The extent to which society can carry on without doctrines of state is proved by practical experience itself, and there is no need of science in this. Even a baby seeks to drink its mother’s milk by various means. So, set aside all these tortures and enjoy the pleasures of life according to your preference.

“There are those who preach: ‘Thus should the senses be controlled. Thus should the six enemies⁶ be abjured. Conciliation and the other means should always be employed with allies and adversaries. Time should be spent only in discussion of war and peace; not the least of it should be given up for pleasures.’ They are the crafty storks, the ministers who earn their wealth by theft of yours, and enjoy it in the houses of their concubines.

“And who are these wretches, the stern exponents of political science, Sukra, Angiras, Viśālāksha, Bāhudanti’s son,⁷ Parāśara and the others? Did they conquer the six enemies or practise all the precepts? Their works too are marked with failures as well as successes, and many men of learning have been deceived by illiterates.

“Your Majesty is the scion of a line venerated the world over,” Vihāra Bhadra continued. “You have youth, beauty and unlimited wealth. Do not merely waste your time in domestic and foreign affairs of state. They impede pleasures, raise doubts in all one does because of the alternatives possible, and create mistrust everywhere.

“You have ten thousand elephants, three hundred thousand cavalry and countless infantry. Your vaults are full of gold and jewels. Your stores will not be emptied even if the whole world were to feed from them for a thousand years. Is this not enough, that you should trouble yourself for the wealth of others? We live only for a few days. In that time too the portion of life which can be enjoyed is only a fragment. Fools kill themselves making money. They have no time to savour even a particle of what they have earned. What is there more to say? Leave the burden of government to those who are competent, trustworthy and devoted to you. Enjoy yourself with the ladies of your harem who are like the nymphs of paradise; hold music, dance and drinking parties according to the season; and make the most of this life.”

‘Vihāra Bhadra then prostrated himself before the king, and lay long on the ground, his clasped hands touching his head. The women of the harem, their eyes twinkling with delight, burst into laughter. The king smiled. “Get up,” he said as he raised the playful retainer, “you are a guru, sir, by virtue of your good advice. You cannot behave in an ungurulike way.”

‘In the days that followed, the old minister repeatedly urged King Ananta Varmā towards the matter he had earlier raised. The king would agree outwardly, but at heart he paid no attention, feeling that the minister did not understand him. At last the old man said to himself. “Alas, I have deluded myself into a childish folly. Urging him towards something he dislikes, I have become, like a supplicant, an eyesore and an object of derision. The king’s behaviour is clearly no longer as it was before. He does not look at me kindly or speak to me with a smile. He does not hold my hand or share any secrets with me. Unsympathetic during difficulties, ungracious during festivities, he does not send me any presents, nor acknowledge the good work I do. On the contrary, he excludes me from ongoing work and ignores my supporters. He does not enquire about my family or take me to his inner apartments. Instead he assigns me to unworthy tasks, permits others to encroach upon my office, and displays confidence in my enemies. He does not reply to what I say, reviles others for faults similar to mine, ridicules me in delicate issues, and contradicts me even when I express the same view as his. He does not welcome the invaluable gifts I send, and has the mistakes of statesmen proclaimed before me by fools. Chanakya indeed spoke truly:

Even the unworthy become dear if they
anticipate and follow his inclinations.
But those who ignore such whims
are disliked, even if competent.

“What should be done? Despite his actions, this king should not be abandoned by people like me who have served his father and grandfather. But, even if we do not abandon him, what can we do for him when he does not listen to us? There is no doubt but this kingdom will fall into the hands of Vasanta Bhanu, the clever lord of Asmaka.⁸ It is possible that future calamities may bring our king back to his senses. The discomforts of misfortune sometimes give occasion for regret. But even that may not induce him towards proper conduct. Well, so be it. A disaster is bound to occur. I must restrain my candid tongue and somehow remain in office.”

‘While the minister was in this state, the king remained absorbed in pleasures. Indra Pālita, the minister of the lord of Aśmaka, had a son named Chandra Pālita. Pretending to have been exiled by his father on account of misconduct, he came to Vidarbha with many singers, skilled female artistes, and spies disguised as attendants, and soon brought Vihāra Bhadra under his influence with various entertainments. In the latter’s company he also gained access to the king. Getting the opportunity, he began to support whichever vice⁹ the king cultivated.

“Sire,” he would say, “there is nothing as beneficial as the hunt. It provides abundant exercise, which strengthens the legs, enables travel over long distances and helps in emergencies. The diminution of phlegm stokes the fires of digestion, the first prerequisite of good health. The reduction of fat makes the limbs steady, firm and light. The tolerance of cold and heat, wind and rain, hunger and thirst, is increased. So is the knowledge of how various creatures react under different conditions. Hunting deer, wild buffalo and similar game protects the crops from destruction. Killing wolves, tigers and such beasts keeps the roads free of obstacles. Hunting also helps to maintain a watch over those responsible for different tasks in hill and forest regions, to assure the forest-dwellers, and to intimidate adversaries by bolstering the military spirit. Thus, it has many virtues.

“Gambling too has merits. The renunciation of quantities of wealth, as if it is no more than straw, gives an incomparable liberality of the temperament. The uncertainty of gain or loss makes the heart impervious to joy or sorrow. The capacity increases for wrath, the prime fount of valour. The observation of exceedingly subtle legerdemain with dice and sleights of hand provides an infinite sharpness to the intellect. Concentration on one subject assures an exceptional single-mindedness. Delight increases in daring, the companion of enterprise. Competition with the strong-minded makes for self-confidence, indomitability and magnanimity.

“The enjoyment of excellent women, on its part, brings to fruition the pursuit of both virtue and wealth,” Chandra Palita would add. “It enhances man’s self-esteem. It skills him in judging emotions, promotes proficiency in all the arts, and prompts effort unafflicted by greed. The readiness of mind and speech are improved by the constant devising of new expedients: to make a new conquest; to safeguard it, once made; to enjoy it, once secured; to savour its pleasures and to propitiate angry mistresses. The body is kept trim and well-dressed, leading to respect in society. Friends become dearer, and servants

more attentive. One speaks with a smile, radiates authority and acts with courtesy. The procreation of children further provides benefits in both this and the next world.

“As for drinking, it is efficacious in the cure of all kinds of illness. Sufficient potation of wine preserves much desired youth. It elevates the ego, enabling all sorrows to be disregarded. It kindles passion and stimulates the capacity for sexual enjoyment. Erasing the memory of past offences, it clears the mind of the pricks of guilt. Trust is increased by innocent, uninhibited talk. Happiness is intensified by the absence of envy. Sound and other sensory perceptions are enhanced. The inclination to drink in company encourages hospitality. The limbs acquire unparalleled charm and peerless grace. The fighting spirit grows and fear and distress disappear. Similarly, harshness in speech, cruelty in punishment and impropriety in financial affairs are helpful, depending on the occasion. A king given to quietism like a hermit cannot defeat his enemies or maintain the state.”

‘The king complied most respectfully with Chandra Pālita’s advice as if it were a guru’s injunction. The people emulated the king and cultivated vices without any restraint. No one attempted to find fault with the others as all were equally at fault. The officers of state followed the king and the populace, and each appropriated the proceeds of his work. The sources of revenue dried up gradually. But, as the king was guided by libertines, the expenditures increased day by day.

‘Confident that the nobles, the city leaders and the village heads shared his inclinations, the king included them and their wives in his drinking parties where they too broke the rules of proper conduct. The king misbehaved with their wives on various pretexts. They in turn boldly passed their time in many pleasures with the king’s women who also had shed their shame. All the ladies of good family were taken up with vulgar talk. The restraints of decorum having been breached, they cared not a jot for their husbands and listened only to their paramours. This led to angry quarrels. The weak were slain by the strong. The wealthy were plundered by bandits and others. The paths of sin, disapproved of no longer, were trodden once again.

‘Their kinsmen killed, their money looted, suffering from murders and arrests, the people raised a loud and tearful outcry. Unjust punishments gave birth to fear and anger. The poor became covetous. The powerful felt insulted and seethed with wounded pride. The intrigues of outsiders spread through all kinds of criminal acts. In this situation, the poisoners and other agents of the lord of Aśmaka began

to weaken King Ananta Varmā's forces, destroying their chief warriors by a variety of methods.

'Some of these agents were disguised as hunters. They tempted the Vidarbha warriors with descriptions of abundant game into inaccessible mountain valleys, full of dry bamboo and grass, and set fire to their sole points of exit. Encouraging others to go after tiger and suchlike, they threw them to those beasts. Yet others were led far away in search of water, and abandoned to die of hunger and thirst; or made to traverse difficult paths where they plunged down precipices well hidden by dense grass. Some were done to death with poisoned knives, used to extract thorns from their feet; or shot down with arrows supposedly discharged at the game, or, left alone when their followers had scattered in different directions, they were liquidated at leisure. Others were induced to climb steep mountain peaks on wager, and pushed down when no one was looking. A few warriors were captured in the forests by agents disguised as jungle-dwellers; and some were taken by force into crowds such as those at dice games, bird fights and festivals where they became the victims of violence by others.

'The secret affairs of some warriors were made public through witnesses so that they fled to save themselves from scandal. Some were linked through friendship with the wives of others, and the lover or the husband or both were killed, with the deed being attributed to desperation. Some were lured to trysts with treacherous women, and done to death ignominiously by others who lay in wait. Some were enticed to enter caves to dig for treasure, or win magical powers, and so dispatched that their deaths seemed accidental. Some were encouraged to mount elephants in rut, and then denied the help needed to rescue them.

'Maddened rogue elephants were let loose in gatherings of leading men. Those involved in inheritance disputes were murdered in private, and the other side blamed for the crime. Desperados in the towns and the villages of the landed nobility were also struck down in secret, and the names of their enemies publicized to arouse suspicions. Some warriors were tempted to consort day and night with specially trained women, and infected with consumptive disease. With gifts of clothes, ornaments, garlands and cosmetics, all cleverly treated with poison, their maladies were then aggravated in the guise of medication.

'In due course Vasanta Bhānu incited the ruler of Vanavāsī,¹⁰ Bhānu Varmā, to engage in conflict with the King of Vidarbha. His frontiers

attacked by the Vanavāsīs, Ananta Varmā assembled his forces to offer resistance. Among all his nobles, it was the lord of Aśmaka who won his favour by being the first to rally to his side. The others followed, all camping on the banks of the river Narmadā nearby. The chief noble, Avanti Devā of Kuntala, had a personal dancer famed as the earthly Urvaśī¹¹ whose skills had been highly praised by Chandra Palita and others. Ananta Varmā summoned her on this occasion and watched her dance; smitten by passion he possessed her while she was inebriated.

“The lord of Asmaka told the lord of Kuntala privately: “This mad king lays hands on our women. How long can such insults be tolerated? I have a hundred elephants, and you have five hundred. We should get together and also mobilize Vira Sena, the lord of Muralā, Ekavīra of Richika, Kumāra Gupta of Konkana, and Nāgapāla, the lord of Nāsikya.¹² They too are unable to bear his misconduct, and will certainly join us. The Vanavāsī ruler is a dear friend of mine. While he engages this ill-mannered king in front, we will strike him from behind and divide his treasure and transport among us.” The lord of Kuntala agreed happily. The Aśmaka chief then sent as gifts twenty excellent robes and twenty-five gold and saffron shawls to the other nobles, consulting them through a trusted intermediary and winning them over to his plan.

‘On the following day Ananta Varmā fell a victim to his nobles and the King of Vanavāsī, and to his own lack of foresight. His disarrayed treasure and transport was captured by Vasanta Bhānu who cunningly told the others: “Please take this and divide it according to your capabilities. I will be satisfied with whatever you permit as my share.” Pretending to be the supporter of every noble, he used the greed of each to provoke conflict among them, and thus destroyed them all. He then seized their possessions and, propitiating the Vanavāsī king with a certain share, brought the entire kingdom of Ananta Varmā under his own control.

‘At this stage the old minister, Vasu Rakṣita, met some other hereditary ministers to plan an escape from the disaster with this boy, Bhāskara Varmā, his thirteen-year-old elder sister, Manjuvādinī, and their mother, Queen Vasundharā. As fate would have it, however, he died of a fever. Friends like us then took the queen and her children to Māhishmatī, and presented them before our master’s stepbrother Mitra Varmā. But that villain regarded the noble lady in a different way. When she repulsed him he thought that, apart from her chaste conduct, she wished to make her son the successor to the throne, and

tried without compunction to have this boy murdered.

‘On learning this, the queen commanded me: “Dear Nalijangha, take this child while he is still alive and live with him carefully wherever you can. If I am spared I will also follow him. Travel safely, and keep me posted with your news.” Somehow I took the boy out of the bustling palace and went into the Vindhya forest. As he was tired out by travelling on foot, we rested for a few days in a village of cowherds so that he could recoup his strength; but I was afraid of pursuit by the royal officers, and we took this distant route. The boy suffered terribly from thirst and, in attempting to get water for him, I slipped and fell into this well where I have been favoured by you. Now you must become the protector of this prince who has nowhere else to go.’

The Further Tale of Viśruta

On my asking about the family of the child’s mother, the old man said: ‘She is the daughter of Kusuma Dhanvā, lord of Kosala, and Sāgaradattā, daughter of Vaiśravana the merchant of Pātaliputra.’ ‘If that is so,’ I replied, affectionately embracing the child, ‘then his mother and my father had the same maternal grandfather.’ ‘Which of the sons of Sindhudatta was your father?’ asked the old man, and he was delighted on my naming Suśruta.

I swore that I would overthrow the lord of Asmaka, who was so proud of his statecraft, by stratagem alone and restore the boy to his father’s throne. I also thought about our food. At that moment there appeared two deer with a hunter in pursuit whose arrows had already been evaded by them three times. I seized the bow and the remaining two arrows from his hands, and shot away. One deer was struck so that the feathers still remained on the shaft; the other was pierced through and through.

One of the deer I gave to the hunter. The other I skinned and removed its inner organs. Cutting off its neck, thigh bones and other parts, I spitted the flesh on a spear and roasted it on the embers of a forest fire. With that I and the other two satisfied our hunger. The hunter was very pleased with my skilful work. I asked him if he knew anything of the news from Mahishmati. ‘Why won’t I know,’ he said, ‘I have returned from there today itself after selling a tiger skin and some leather bags. Prachanda Varmā, the younger brother of Chanda Varmā,¹³ is anxious to obtain the hand of Mitra Varmā’s daughter Manjuvadini. He is coming there and the city is in festival for him.’

‘By dealing properly with the daughter,’ I told the old man aside,

‘the cunning Mitra Varmā actually wishes to assure the mother. Through her he would like to get back this boy and eliminate him. You should therefore return and, after telling the queen in private about the welfare of her son and what I have explained, you should publicly raise a hue and cry that the prince has been devoured by a tiger. That villain will be pleased at heart, but outwardly he will display sorrow and go to condole with the queen. You should get her to say to him: “The boy for whose sake I ignored your interests has himself perished because of my sins. Now I am at your disposal.” This will please him, and he will make a pass at her. She should then strike him on the face and the chest with a garland dipped in water mixed with the powerful poison called Vatsanabha, and cry out: “If I have been a chaste wife, let this be as a blow of the sword on you, sinner.” The garland should then be dipped in water mixed with this antedote and given to her own daughter. Mitra Varmā having died and the girl returning unaffected by the garland, the people will be convinced that chastity has given holy powers to the queen, and render all support to her.

‘A message should then be sent to Prachanda Varmā: “This kingdom is leaderless. Please accept it together with this maiden.” Meanwhile the prince and I will disguise ourselves as skull-bearing Kāpālīka mendicants, to whom the queen alone may give alms, and start living near the cremation ground outside the city. She should summon good and trustworthy city elders and senior ministers to a private meeting, and tell them: “The goddess Vindhyavāsinī, she who lives in the Vindhya, favoured me with a dream today. ‘Prachanda Varmā,’ she told me, ‘will die four days hence. On the the fifth day, the gate of my temple on the banks of the river Revā should be opened after all the worshippers have gone and an examination shows the place to be deserted. A young Brahmin will emerge from the temple together with your son. He will protect the kingdom and enthrone your child whom I, in the guise of a tigress, have concealed and guarded. Your daughter Manjuvādinī was born to be the wife of that young Brahmin.’ This great secret should now remain hidden among you till it is realized.”’

Very pleased, old Nālījangha then departed and the task was carried out as I had envisaged. The word spread everywhere: ‘Look at the holy powers of chaste women! A stroke of the garland became a blow of the sword on that man. It is not possible to say that this was the work of some trickery. The very same garland was given to her daughter and, far from causing her death, it became an ornament on her breast. Whoever disobeys this chaste lady will clearly be reduced to ashes.’

The son and I went to the queen, disguised as holy mendicants seeking alms. She was beside herself with joy. Milk welled up in her breasts as she got up and said: 'Lord, I salute you. Grant your favour to this helpless person. Will my dream come true or not?' 'You will see its result today itself,' I replied. 'In that case this your slave is truly fortunate,' she said, 'for the dream signified a husband for her.' And, getting Manjuvādinī, who stood stockstill with emotion on seeing me, to make a salutation, she continued gaily: 'But if the dream turns out to be false, I will arrest your young skull-bearer tomorrow!' 'So be it,' I answered with a smile, my composure already shaken by Manjuvādinī's starstruck gaze. Taking the alms and calling for Nālijangha, we then departed.

The old man followed us. 'Where is that famous and now doomed Prachanda Varmā?' I asked him quietly. 'He has no doubt that the kingdom is already his,' Nālijangha replied, 'he is in the royal assembly hall, being lauded by the bards.' 'Then stay in the garden,' I told him. On one side of the garden wall was a small empty chapel. I took off my disguise there and, instructing the prince to guard it, I dressed myself as a bard. I then went up to Prachanda Varmā and commenced to entertain him.

It was the red-tinged hour of dusk. I danced and sang and mimicked all kinds of cries for the edification of the assembly, walking on my hands, and whirling on one leg with arms outstretched. I demonstrated effortlessly the motions of the scorpion and the crocodile, and the leaps of the fish. Repeatedly taking their daggers from nearby spectators, and placing their points on my body, I performed marvellous and difficult feats, displaying the flights of the hawk and the osprey. Prachanda Varmā was seated twenty arms length away. At last I flung a dagger at him, roaring 'May Vasanta Bhānu live for a thousand years!' and struck him full in the chest. A soldier raised his sword to cut me down, but I leapt on his stout shoulder and uplifted arm, knocking him senseless and, as the agitated assembly gaped upwards, I vaulted across the wall which was as high as two men and landed in the garden.

Even as I said: 'My pursuers will recognize this trail,' Nālijangha levelled the sand and erased my footprints. I sprinted eastwards through an alley of tamala trees along the wall, and turned west where my track ceased to be visible because of many piles of bricks. Running swiftly, I crossed the wall, the rampart and the encircling moat, and quickly entered the empty chapel where I assumed the earlier disguise of the mendicant. Making our way with some

difficulty through the palace gate which was in turmoil on account of my deed, I then went with the prince to the cremation ground.

In the temple of the goddess I had earlier made a recess under the pedestal of her image itself. Its opening had been covered with a heavy stone, the sides of which had been left loose. Shortly after midnight the prince and I, attired in expensive bejewelled ornaments and silk garments brought by a euunch, entered the recess and silently stayed inside.

The queen had already performed the appropriate cremation rites for Prachaṇḍa Varmā of Mālava, and conveyed to his brother Chanda Varmā that the murder has been instigated by the lord of Aśmaka. On the following morning she came to the temple with the city elders and the senior ministers and nobles she had earlier informed of her dream. After praying to the goddess, she had the building examined in front of all the people to establish that there was no one inside. She then stood with them, all eyes on the sanctum, and caused a drum to be beaten loudly. The sound reached me through a tiny hole and gave me the signal. Lifting the iron pedestal under the image with my head, I grasped it with both hands and shifted it to one side, a feat not easy even for a strong man. Then I came out with the prince and, replacing the goddess as before, opened the portal and appeared before the crowd assembled there.

The people were thrilled and amazed. The joy of faith shone in their eyes as they clasped their hands and made obeisances. Addressing them, I said: 'Thus does the goddess Vindhyaśinī command you through my words. "This prince was in peril. I pitied him and in the guise of a tigress I took him away. Today I give him to you. Accept him and remember that, as my son, his mother's family is not powerless."' 'Know also,' I added, 'the goddess has made me this boy's protector. I will destroy that vassal of wickedness, the heartless Asmaka whose many difficult and clever intrigues now stand exposed. As the price of my protection the noble goddess has decreed this beautiful-browed maiden, the sister of the prince for me.'

The people were delighted at my words. 'How fortunate is the Bhoja dynasty,' they cried, 'to have you as the protector ordained by our lady.' The joy of my future mother-in-law was beyond description. That very day she gave to me the tender hand of Manjuvādini in marriage with all ceremony. At night I filled up the recess in the temple nicely. The people had no inkling of what I had done. By the use of various tricks, like guessing what one conceals in the hand or is thinking about, I convinced them that I too had some divine powers,

so that they did not dare to disobey my orders. The prince's prestige also increased as word spread that he was the son of the goddess. On an auspicious day I had him tonsured and invested with the sacred thread by a priest. I then began to instruct him in politics as I administered the kingdom.

‘All governance,’ I considered, ‘depend on three factors: counsel, authority and energy. When they complement each other these factors ensure progress in the affairs of state. By counsel and consultation alone can proper decisions be made about the state's objectives. To pursue them requires authority and their accomplishment depends on energetic efforts. The tree of statesmanship, if it is to benefit the leader, must have as its root the five elements of counsel; the two aspects of authority as its trunk; and the four categories of effort as its branches.¹⁴ It should also have the seventy-two attributes as its leaves, the six qualities as the buds, and power and achievement as the flowers and the fruit. Even then this tree needs many supports and cannot be cultivated without assistance. It would, as such, be good to obtain the services of Mitra Varmā's minister, Ārya Ketu. He comes from Kośala and belongs to the prince's maternal family. He also has all the virtues of a minister: Mitra Varmā was in fact destroyed because he ignored his advice.’

I then instructed Nālijangha privately: ‘Father, speak to the noble Ārya Ketu when he is alone. “Who is this man of mystery,” ask him, “who is battenning upon the kingdom? Our young prince has been bewitched by that serpent. Will he swallow him or will he let him go?” Then tell me what he says.’

Nālijangha reported back to me after some time. ‘I cultivated Ārya Ketu with many gifts,’ he told me. ‘I engaged him in interesting conversations and even massaged his hands and feet. Getting into his confidence, I asked the question you had indicated. “Don't speak thus,” he said, referring to you, “that man, good sir, is the repository of all the virtues, even one of which it is difficult to find in others. He reflects a pure family background. He has extraordinary intelligence, superhuman capability, boundless generosity, amazing skill with weapons, and not a little knowledge of the arts. His heart is full of compassion and his prowess while confronting enemies is irresistible. He is a deadly poison plant for adversaries and a comforting sandalwood tree for the humble. You should know that it was he who overthrew that self-styled statesman Āsmaka and installed the prince on his father's throne. He is above all doubt.”’

Having repeatedly tested Ārya Ketu with various temptations, I

made him my advisor and assistant. With his help I appointed true and honest men as ministers, and as confidential agents with many disguises. Through them I identified those among the populace who were covetous, wealthy, proud and largely ungovernable. Promoting morality and abstention from greed, stamping out heresy and eliminating opposition, cleverly destroying enemies and establishing the four castes in their respective duties, I then began to accumulate resources for the state. Considering that there is nothing more reprehensible than slackness in this work as resources are essential for the implementation of state policy, I took all the necessary measures.



UTTARA-PĪTHIKĀ

The Later Part

‘I considered carefully,’ Viśruta continued. ‘All the retainers are extremely brave and so devoted to me that they will count even their lives as no more than straw in carrying out my commands. With the military resources of two kingdoms at my disposal, I am not less than Vasanta Bhānu, the lord of Aśmaka, in any way. I am also well versed in statecraft, and thus fully capable of defeating him and installing Bhāskara Varmā as the King of Vidarbha on the throne of his father Ananta Varmā.

‘The rumour has already spread everywhere that this prince is the acknowledged son of the goddess, and that I have been appointed to help him. No one knows to this day that I had contrived a deception. The people here have the firm expectation that the son of their lord, Ananta Varmā, will get back his kingdom by the grace of the goddess.

‘The army of Aśmaka too has learnt that the prince has the goddess’ support. Believing that human strength cannot prevail over divine power, that army seems to be in two minds about confronting us. The hereditary ministers and others here have wanted the prince’s restoration from the beginning; they have now been assured and further induced to support him by my gifts and honours.’

The confidants and servants of the Aśmaka lord had been cultivated by our agents on my orders. They were told in secret overtures: ‘You are our friends and our words must be for your welfare. It is well known that the goddess has appointed Viśruta to help the prince. He will certainly dispatch to hell all those who fight against him on the side of Vasanta Bhānu. Before he declares war on the lord of Aśmaka it is better for you to join Bhāskara Varmā. Whoever does this will receive many benefits and live happily with his supporters, free of fear; otherwise he will become a target for the trident of the goddess. She has commanded us to tell this once to everyone. That is why we are warning you in view of our friendship.’

Those confidants and servants had already begun to have second thoughts, considering that the prince was favoured by the goddess. Specially after getting my message, they all submitted to my authority.

When the lord of Aśmaka received this news, he too began to ponder: 'The prince's hereditary ministers and all his subjects wish to see him restored. My servants, public as well as personal, seem to be having second thoughts. Disaffection will only spread if I forbear and do nothing; I will then be unable to protect even my own territory. My army is already vacillating and could well betray me. Before the other side begins any conspiracy with it, I should myself declare war. The prince will certainly not be able to withstand me for long.' Having made up his mind, he then proceeded with his army against our forces, driven, as it were, straight into the jaws of death by the sin of unjust aggression against another state.

The prince came to the front on learning of this invasion. I went forth on horseback to meet the approaching lord of Aśmaka. His entire army stood motionless like figures in a picture. They were convinced that if their countless force was being confronted by a single warrior, the only and extraordinary reason for this could be the favour of the goddess and nothing else. Going up to Vasanta Bhānu, I challenged him to combat. He struck at me strongly with his sword, but I was well trained and parried his blow. Counter-attacking, I severed his head which fell to the ground. I then addressed his soldiers: 'Let those who still wish to fight after this come forward and battle with me. Otherwise pay homage at the prince's feet, become his subjects, and live happily, each enjoying his livelihood and discharging his duties without any fear.' After my speech they all dismounted suddenly and, saluting the prince, accepted to be under his authority. I decreed the territory of Aśmaka to be under the prince and appointed our ministers and officers for its protection. Proceeding to Vidarbha with the Aśmaka army, which was now ours, I crowned prince Bhāskara Varmā in the capital, and placed him on his father's throne.

Once I represented to the king as he sat with his mother: 'There is one work which I would like to start. It is not possible for me to stay at any one place until it is completed. My wife Manjuvādinī is your sister. Let her stay with you for some time. I will travel meanwhile until I can find a particular person who is dear to me. After that I will come back.'

The king consulted his mother. 'Why do you say this, sir?' he asked me. 'You alone are the single cause of our restoration, symbolized by

the recovery of this kingdom. The yoke of its governance cannot be borne by us without you, even for a moment.'

'You should not let this concern you in the least,' I said. 'You have in Ārya Ketu a jewel of a minister in your court. He can bear the weight of several such kingdoms. I will go only after appointing him.' But, despite these and other words of persuasion, the king and his mother insisted and prevailed upon me to postpone my journey for some time. He presented me with the kingdom of Prachanda Varmā, the ruler of Utkala.¹ By the time I had established my rule there and taken the king's permission to set out in your search, I was summoned by King Simha Varmā of Anga to come to his assistance. My past good deeds have now borne fruit, and I have met you on coming here.

*

The princes now assembled there were: Apahāra Varmā, Upahāra Varmā, Artha Pāla, Pramati, Mitra Gupta, Mantra Gupta and Viśruta. They had already sent a message to summon Soma Datta who enjoyed the position of heir-apparent in Pātalipura. Dispatching servants to fetch him and his bright-eyed wife, they remained meanwhile with Rājavāhana. As they talked joyfully with each other, officers arrived from Pushpapura² with orders from King Rājahamsa. Saluting Rājavāhana, they stated: 'Master, accept this missive from your father Rājahamsa.' Rising up in the assembly, the prince received the letter with many respectful salutations and placed it on his head before unsealing it. He then read it out as all the others listened.

'All hail. His Majesty King Rājahamsa from the auspicious capital Pushpapura blesses Rājavāhana and the princes led by him, presently at the city of Champā, and sends this commandment.

'After saluting me and taking leave, you had proceeded from here and camped on the way in a forest near the temple of Siva. Rajavāhana had spent the night in the temple, praying to the god, but could not be found the next morning. All the other princes had then vowed: "We will present ourselves before Rājahamsa only together with Rājavāhana; otherwise we will give up our lives." They had sent the army back, and each gone separately in search of Rājavāhana.

'On receiving this news from the returning soldiers, both I and your mother were plunged into an ocean of grief. We decided that we would go to the hermitage of Vāmadeva and renounce our lives after informing him of this news. On arriving at the hermitage, even as we saluted the omniscient sage, he understood at once what was in our

hearts. “O King,” he said, “I already know through mystic powers all that you have at heart. For some time your princes will undergo difficulties for the sake of Rājavāhana. But their fortunes will revive and, conquering all the quarters with extraordinary valour, they will acquire many kingdoms. They will return in the sixteenth year with the victorious Rājavāhana in the forefront and, paying homage to you and Vasumatī, they will carry out your commands. So do not do anything reckless in this context.” Full of faith in these words, the queen and I continued to live patiently from that day.

“The time prescribed is now near at hand. I went again to Vamadeva’s hermitage and represented: “Master, the time prescribed by you is almost over. Do you now know where they are?” The sage replied: “O King, all the princes led by Rājavāhana are assembled at Champā. They have vanquished many indomitable enemies, conquered all the quarters and subdued the entire earth. Now you must quickly send servants with your orders to bring them home.”

“This letter of command is being sent to summon you in accordance with the sage’s words. After this, if you delay yourselves even for a moment, know that you will find me and your mother Vasumatī as no more than a memory. Therefore do not stop on the way, even for a drink of water.’

The princes accepted the father’s command with all respect and determined to go forthwith. They appointed capable and trustworthy persons in different places with adequate forces for the protection of the kingdoms they had subdued, and assigned some soldiers for security on the way. Deciding that they would defeat their old enemy Mānasāra, King of Mālava, and overpower his kingdom before making obeisance at the feet of King Rājahamsa and Queen Vasumatī at Pushpapura, they proceeded towards Mālava, each with his wife and a limited army.

On their arrival at Ujjayinī, the King of Mālava, even though very powerful, was quickly vanquished and slain by Rājavāhana assisted by the other princes. Taking Mānasāra’s daughter Avanti Sundarī, Rājavāhana freed the prince Pushpodbhava and his family who had earlier been imprisoned by the minister Chaṇḍa Varmā.³ After the kingdom of Mālava had been subdued, and ministers with troops appointed for its protection, the princes proceeded to Pushpapura with the remaining army.

With Rājavāhana in the forefront, the princes made obeisance at the feet of Rājahamsa and mother Vasumatī. Both were overjoyed at being reunited with their son. The sage Vāmadeva knew the hearts of all the

ten princes led by Rājavāhana. He told them in front of the King and Queen Vasumatī: 'All of you should now return, each to his kingdom, and rule it with justice. You can come back whenever you wish to pay your respects at the feet of the parents.'

All the princes accepted the sage's word with utmost respect. Saluting him and both parents, each narrated his tale from departure to victorious return. The parents were overjoyed to hear the tales of the princes, which revealed the hazardous adventures and the prowess of each. 'Lord,' the king said humbly to the sage, 'by your grace we have attained a happiness which is more than anyone can wish for; it is beyond words and even thought. After this it is appropriate that I enter the hermit's life and devote myself to spiritual pursuits at your feet. After Rajavahana is consecrated in the kingdoms of Pushpapura and Malava, the remaining kingdoms should be suitably given to the other nine princes. It is for you to so ordain that these princes live in accord with Rājavāhana, carrying out his commands, uprooting enemies, and enjoying this earth with its girdle of the four oceans.'

The sage observed that the princes were determined to prevent the father from entering the hermit's life. 'O Princes,' he said to them, 'your father wishes to lead the hermit's life. It is appropriate to his age. He will stay without any bodily discomfort in my hermitage itself. You should certainly not stand in his way. Staying here, he will be able to devote himself to God. You too will not be comfortable in his presence.'

In accordance with the sage's admonition the princes gave up their insistence against the father becoming a hermit. Installing Rajavahana in Pushpapura his vassals began to rule their respective kingdoms with his permission. They would visit the parents as and when they wished. Thus did the princes led by Rājavāhana justly rule the entire earth with his permission, maintaining perfect mutual accord and enjoying royal pleasures rare even for the king of the gods.

Notes

Introduction

- ¹ *Madhurāvijaya* of Gangā Devī, I. 10, ed. G.H. Sastri and V.S. Sastri, Trivandrum 1924. This translation by A.N.D. Haksar.
- ² *Śārngadhara Paddhati*, 188 quoted in introduction to *Subhāshitāvali* ed. R.D. Karmarkar, Poona 1961.
- ³ Cf. A.K. Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature* Vol. IV, Delhi 1983, and Maan Singh, *Subandhu and Daṇḍin*, Delhi 1979. Both these works are referred to in subsequent notes only by the author's name.
- ⁴ *Subhāshita Ratna Bhāṇḍagāram*, 37/63 ed. N.R. Acharya, Delhi 1978. This translation by A.N.D. Haksar.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 35/19.
- ⁶ Cf. A.K. Warder and Maan Singh for this section.
- ⁷ *Avantisundarī* of Dandin, pub. S.K. Pillai, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series No. 172, names them, respectively as Lalitalaya, author of *Śūdraka Charita*, Ranamalla, Matridatta and Ramasarman.
- ⁸ *Kāvyalakṣaṇa* ed. A. Thakur and U. Jha, Darbhanga 1957.
- ⁹ *Subhāshita Ratna Bhāṇḍagāram*, 35/20.
- ¹⁰ E.g. the Kannada *Kavirājamārga* of Nripatunga (+ 9), the Tamil *Dandī Alankāram*, and the Hindi *Kavīpriyā* of Keśavadāsa (+ 17). Cf. Maan Singh.
- ¹¹ Vide 3 above.
- ¹² Earlier commentaries listed in S.K. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, Calcutta 1960. Recent ones include R.R. Sastri, Poona 1938 and S.K. Belvalkar, Poona 1924.
- ¹³ Cf. Maan Singh,
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ It is mentioned in the commentary of Taruna Vachaspati (I. 24) on the *Kāvyadarśa*, cf. Maan Singh. The former is dated to end + 12 early + 13, cf. S.K. De. An extract is also quoted in the + 15 work *Abhijñāna Śakuntalā Charchā*.
- ¹⁶ H.H. Wilson, London 1846; H. Fauche, Paris 1862; J.J. Meyer, Leipzig 1902.
- ¹⁷ *Dasa Kumara Charitam* ed. G.J. Agashe, Bombay 1919, and M.R. Kale, Bombay 1925. Also A.B. Keith, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, Oxford 1920.
- ¹⁸ *Avantisundarī*, ed. M.R. Kavi, Madras 1924 and 7 above.

- ¹⁹ A.K. Warder and Maan Singh.
²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ A.K. Warder.
²² Ibid.
²³ Ibid.
²⁴ S.K. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, Calcutta 1960.
²⁵ *Kāvyaadarśa*, I. 7, 63, 65 quoted in Maan Singh.
²⁶ Ibid., I. 80.
²⁷ E.g. Sahitya Akademi's *Anthology of Poetry and Drama*, New Delhi 1970.
²⁸ A.K. Warder.
²⁹ A.B. Keith, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, oxford 1920.
³⁰ Cf. Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, Vol. I, London 1977 for this and the preceding two paragraphs.
³¹ Ibid.
³² E.g. M.R. Kale, Bombay 1925 and C.S.R. Sastri Madras 1931. A recent translation by Isabelle Orions, *What Ten Young Men Did*, New York, 2005, also attempts to reproduce the labial-free effect in one chapter of the original.
³³ A.W. Ryder, *Dasha Kumar Charita: The Ten Princes*, University of Chicago Press 1927.
³⁴ The anonymous *Padadīpikā*; Kavindrāchārya Sarasvatī's *Padachandrikā*, Śivarāma's *Bhūṣaṇā* and Bhānuchandra's *Laghudīpikā*. The first mentioned covers only the *Pūrva-pīthikā*, and none cover the *Uttara-pīthikā*.
³⁵ V. Jha, *Daśakumāracharitam*, Delhi 1984.
³⁶ S.K. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, Calcutta 1960.

Purva-pithika

Chapter One : The Birth of the Princes

- ¹ Trivikrama or Vāmana was a divine incarnation of the god Vishnu in Hindu mythology, who bestrode the universe in three cosmic strides. The god with upraised foot was a popular theme in art and literature. A fine example from Dandin's time is the rock cut relief at Mamallapuram near Madras.
² In ancient Indian mythology the earth rested on the hood of a divine serpent, and was supported and guarded on all sides by eight celestial elephants.
³ A celebrated temple of this name exists in modern Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, which is identified as the site of Ujjayinī, the capital of ancient Avanti or Mālava.
⁴ Identified with the area of Madhubani and Sitamarhi in modern north Bihar and Janakpur in Nepal. The kingdom of Magadha

- would be to its south.
- 5 A semi-divine being, mainly attending on the god of wealth and guarding his treasures. Some of them had a malign aspect and would occasionally possess mortals.
 - 6 The *Artha Śāstra* of Kautilya and the *Nitisāra* of Kāmandaki are well known works on politics.

Chapter Two: The Brahmin's Tale

- 1 The hero of the epic *Rāmāyana*.
- 2 The emblem of the god Śiva. Pārvati is his consort.
- 3 A bird traditionally believed to subsist only on raindrops. Identified with *cuculus melanoleucus*. This and other plant and animal identifications are derived from M. Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary, New Delhi 1988.

Chapter Three: The Tale of Soma Datta

- 1 Identified with the area of modern Gujarat surrounding the river Narmadā. This and most place identifications are derived from V.S. Apte's Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Delhi 1970.

Chapter Four: The Tale of Pushpodbhava

- 1 A gesture of affection and blessing in old India.
- 2 Capital of Avanti. See note 3, of Chapter I.
- 3 Ujjayinī by another name.

Chapter Five: The Wedding of Avanti Sundarī

- 1 Respectively the flowering trees *clerodendrum phlomoides*, *vitex negundo*, *butea frondosa*, and *jonesia aśoka*.
- 2 The king of heaven.
- 3 Manmatha, or churning of hearts, is one of the many epithets for Kāma, the god of love. Some fifteen occur in the *Daśa*, but all have generally been rendered as Kama or love.
- 4 Rājahansa literally means royal swan.
- 5 The fragrant root of the plant *andropogon muricatus*, often used in scenting coolants, and commonly known as khus.

Daśa Kumāra Charitam

Chapter Six: The Tale of Rājavāhana

- 1 *Nauclea Cadamba*, a tree with fragrant orange-coloured blooms.
- 2 The area surrounding Bhagalpur in present north-east Bihar.

- 3 Mānasāra, the father of Darpasāra and Avanti Sundarī.
- 4 Nymphs with semi-divine powers who entertained the gods, and were often used by them to carry messages or seduce mortals.
- 5 Another class of semi-divine beings possessed of magic powers.

Chapter Seven: The Tale of Apahāra Varmā

- 1 The terms dharma, artha, and kama, have various shades of meaning. Here they broadly denote pious virtue, wealth and pleasure respectively, the three recognized pursuits or objectives of worldly life. The fourth, moksha or salvation, is a spiritual pursuit.
- 2 Follower of Jainism, a faith now concentrated mainly in western and central India.
- 3 Members of the priestly, warrior and mercantile castes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas, respectively, were considered as born a second time when they were invested with the sacred thread. This distinguished them from others.
- 4 Also known as Mūladeva. He is known in Sanskrit literature as the exponent of the science of theft. His works, unfortunately, are lost.
- 5 Here the connotation is 'ordained way'.
- 6 The Maurya dynasty ruled a vast Indian empire for several centuries up to about 800 years before Dandin's time.
- 7 In the legend, they dug their way into the nether world to rescue their father's horse which the god Indra had taken away.

Chapter Eight: The Tale of Upahāra Varmā

- 1 Two legendary ogres.
- 2 Identified with the south-western area of present West Bengal around the town of Tamluk. The account of King Prahara Varma given here varies somewhat from that in Chapter I.
- 3 The account of Upahara Varma, however, is almost similar.
- 4 A common expression to indicate a surge of maternal affection. As for sniffing or smelling the head, see note 1, Chapter IV.
- 5 In present Assam.
- 6 The beloved wife of the gallant king Udayana, and the heroine of a famous play of the same name by Bhasa, about 600 years before Dandin.
- 7 A tree with bitter leaves and fruit, *azadirachta indica*.
- 8 *Michelia campaka*, which bears fragrant pale yellow flowers.
- 9 The moon-god slept with the wife of Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods. The child of their union was the god Budha. As the latter is also the planet Mercury, while the preceptor is Jupiter and his wife is named Tārā or star, it is conjectured that the myth also has some astronomical context.

- ¹⁰ The relative priority of these objectives had earlier been discussed with a different rationale. See note 1, Chapter VII.
- ¹¹ The fourth of the four Vedas, the highest Hindu scriptures. It also describes sacrificial rituals.

Chapter Nine: The Tale of Artha Pāla

- ¹ The city still flourishes under these names in present Uttar Pradesh. A temple to the god Śiva and the bathing place on the river Gangā, known as Maṇikarṇikā, are also there, though the latter is far from crystal clear now.
- ² The minister Dharma Pāla, his son Kāma Pāla, and the latter's wife Tārāvali are also mentioned in Chapter I. But there is a discrepancy in the names of the king, Ripunjaya and Rajahamsa. The names of the capital city are also different, though they have the same meaning: city of flowers.
- ³ An artificial hill with caves and chambers for recreation. It seems to have been a feature of palace gardens: another is mentioned in Chapter VIII.
- ⁴ An occupational group outside the caste system, engaged in servicing cemeteries, cremation and execution grounds, and similar activities.
- ⁵ The capital of Kubera, god of wealth and king of the Yakshas.
- ⁶ This paragraph alludes to the previous births through which Kama Pala and his two wives, Tārāvali and Kāntimati have passed. These births are not mentioned in the *Daśa*, and possibly figured in an earlier narrative, now lost. There are varying accounts here and in Chapter I about who exactly is the mother of the child Artha Pāla.
- ⁷ The ordained way. See note 5, Chapter VII.

Chapter Ten: The Tale of Pramati

- ¹ A tremor in the right eye, arm or side was considered as an auspicious portent for a man. For a woman it was the same on the left, as will be seen later. Left side tremors for men, and those on the right for women, were considered unlucky omens.
- ² In his incarnation as the divine Boar, the god Vishnu rescued Earth which had fallen into the depths of the Ocean. Earth is often depicted as a woman being lifted from the waters on the Boar's tusk. A good example is the rock-cut relief from Pallava times at Mamallapuram, near Chennai.
- ³ Kama struck the god Śiva with his arrows while the latter was in deep meditation. Angered, he opened his cosmic third eye whose glance incinerated the god of love.
- ⁴ Unlike humans, divine beings did not blink or perspire; and their cosmetics and garments were always fresh.

- ⁵ In Chapter IX Kāma Pāla had been described as the father of Artha Pala. The latter is a close friend of Pramati, as will soon be clear. In keeping with polite usage, the father of a close friend may also be described as ‘your father’.
- ⁶ A city in the kingdom of Kośāla in the time of the Buddha, who is reputed to have stayed there. Its site is identified with Sahet Mahal, north of Ayodhya, in present Uttar Pradesh.
- ⁷ The legendary virtuous king in the epic Mahābhārata, who also bore the name Dharma.
- ⁸ A type of jasmine.
- ⁹ The divine physician.
- ¹⁰ The four Vedas, Rik, Sāma, Yajur, and Atharva, are the highest Hindu scriptures. Their six aṅgas or limbs are auxiliary works intended to aid correct pronunciation, interpretation and ritual use of the Veda texts. They are: śikshā, pronunciation; chhanda, prosody; vyākaraṇa, grammar; nirukta, etymology; jyotiṣa, astronomy; and kalpa, rituals. The sixty-four arts mentioned in the next sentence cover a variety of skills from music and painting to gemology and languages. A full list is given in the *Kama Sutra* of Vātsyāyana.
- ¹¹ See note 6 of Chapter I.

Chapter Eleven: The Tale of Mitra Gupta

- ¹ Also known as Tamralipti, and identified with present Tamluk, south-west of Kolkata. See note 2, Chapter VIII. In ancient times it was a sea-port on the Bay of Bengal but the sea has receded from the area.
- ² Literally, ‘She who dwells in the Vindhya’. A well-known temple to this deity exists in the Vindhya hills near modern Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh.
- ³ Yavana in the original text. Some scholars think the word may here refer to Arabs who were active in maritime traffic at the time. But the traditional meaning, as well as the reference to viniculture in the next line, makes Greek more likely.
- ⁴ An ogre evidently of high pedigree, but nonetheless malign.
- ⁵ One of the metres in Sanskrit prosody, not replicated here.
- ⁶ Identified with the areas of Ludhiana and Patiala in present Punjab.
- ⁷ Identified with a site near Bhavnagar in present Gujarat.
- ⁸ The city lies between Delhi and Agra.
- ⁹ Fragrant flower or *mimusops elengi*. The tree is traditionally said to blossom when sprinkled with wine from the mouth of a young woman

Chapter Twelve: The Tale of Mantra Gupta

- ¹ The southern part of modern Orissa.
- ² Malefic rituals were performed with the left hand.
- ³ Traditional indicator of feminine bashfulness.
- ⁴ *Pterospermum acerifolium*. The flower is also known as golden champā. For the others see notes 9 and 1 of Chapters XI and V respectively.
- ⁵ The Telangana region of modern Andhra Pradesh.

Chapter Thirteen: The Tale of Viśruta

- ¹ The area of Berar between the rivers Narmadā and Krishna in present Maharashtra.
- ² The six traditional expedients in statecraft: sandhi, peace or alliance; vigraha, war; yāna, march or manoeuvre; āsana, halt; dvaidha, feint; āśraya, take shelter.
- ³ Another name of Kautilya, minister of the first Maurya emperor, and reputed author of the *Artha Sāstra*. See also note 6, Chapter I, and note 6, Chapter VII.
- ⁴ Another name of Kautilya.
- ⁵ A time unit of twenty-four minutes.
- ⁶ Lust, anger, greed, pride, infatuation and envy are described as the six enemies who afflict the personality.
- ⁷ Jayadatta. He and the others named in this sentence were well-known ancient writers on law and policy.
- ⁸ An old name for Travancore, Kerala.
- ⁹ Traditionally there were seven major vices of kings: hunting; gambling; womanizing; drink; harshness in speech; cruelty in punishment; and financial dishonesty. Each in turn is justified here.
- ¹⁰ A forest region thought to have been in the Canara area of present Karnataka.
- ¹¹ A celestial dancer had the same name.
- ¹² All these places are traced to western parts of peninsular India.
- ¹³ Regent of Malava. See Chapters IV and VI.
- ¹⁴ The five elements are: allies; means; management of time, and of space; emergency counter-measures. (Kamandaki *Nitisāra*, 12.26). The two aspects are described as abundance of material and human resources. The four types of effort were: conciliation, inducement, disruption and force. The seventy-two attributes are also listed in the *Nitisāra*.

Uttara-pīthikā

Chapter Fourteen: The Later Part

- ¹ Part of Orissa north of Kalinga and south of Suhma. See also note 2, Chapter VIII and note 1, Chapter XII.
- ² Called Pushpapurī in Chapter I. Identifiable with historic Pātaliputra near Patna, capital of present Bihar.
- ³ As described in Chapter VI. The events of Chapters IV and V would have occurred earlier.



THE BEGINNING

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